

A PICTORIAL HISTORY  
ERSKINE TATE / ERSKINE TATE'S VENDOME SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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With this series - "A Pictorial History" - it is intended to collect in chronological order all known photographs illustrating the life of the artist in question. When biographies/discographies are found elsewhere, proper references are given - otherwise details are included below.

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Erskine Tate - leader, violinist, banjoist, arranger, musical director, music teacher - was born December 19, 1895, in Memphis, Tennessee, and died in Chicago, Illinois, on December 17, 1978.

Erskine Tate's father was apparently percussionist Bill Cussack, while his stepfather founded W. L. Jackson's School of Music, Chicago, where his mother was employed as well. Erskine Tate studied music at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, and at the American Conservatory in Chicago. In 1912, he began working as a professional violinist, leader, and multi-instrumentalist in Chicago. Erskine Tate (as violinist) became leader of the four-piece unit at the Phoenix Theatre in 1917, and so impressed the owners at that time, the Hammond Brothers, that they promoted him to lead the pit orchestra at their new 1,500-seat Vendome Theatre across the street. Erskine Tate was briefly leading the Pickford Theatre pit orchestra before moving to the Vendome, 3143-47 at 31st and State Street, since the 1919-opening was postponed due to a construction delay. His Vendome Symphony Orchestra, also known as The Little Symphony, accompanied silent films and played one hour jazz concerts between the shows. The concerts became a sublime experience when Louis Armstrong joined the band in December 1925 (while in the Tate band, to begin with, Armstrong doubled with Lil Hardin at the Dreamland and later on Carroll Dickerson at the Sunset Café and also had a variety of other jobs) and stayed until around April 1927. The Tate engagement developed Armstrong's personality and stage presentation, both as instrumentalist and as singer.



The Erskine Tate Vendome Theater Orchestra - 1921. From left: Harry Johnson, bass sax. Fayette Williams, trombone. Erskine Tate, violin. James Tate, cornet. Jimmy Bertrand, drums. Alvin Fernandez, soprano sax. Adrian Robinson, piano. Norval/Norvelle Morton, alto sax. Joseph McCutcheon, soprano sax. John Hare, helicon. Walter Henry Dyett, banjo. Raymond Whitsett, tenor sax - altogether a 12-piece ensemble. At this time, however, Buster Bailey was also in the band (1919-23) - in addition he held a late-night job with Carroll Dickerson and may have been participating in one of Dickerson's out-of-town tours when this photo was taken.

For nine consecutive years 1919-28 Tate's group played hour-long jazz concerts nightly between the regular movie features at the Vendome! Incidentally Walter Dyett left the band to take over as leader at the Pickford Theatre c. 1924-26.

Apparently, Tate picked versatile musicians, doubling on several instruments - for instance, Raymond Whitsett was known to play trumpet as well.

Originally a nine-piece outfit, by the mid-1920s it had become a 16-piece ensemble. As leader of the most prominent theatre orchestra in Chicago, Tate provided invaluable training for young musicians. Because he led bands in theatres, many musicians doubled with him and went on to play late night clubs after the final theatre show. After leaving the Vendome in March 1928, Tate led a band at the Metropolitan Theatre until 1930/31 and then became musical director of the Michigan Theatre until 1932, when talking pictures brought an end to the pit bands. He continued to lead orchestras in Chicago and out-of-town including regular work at the Gold Coast Club, Triangle Café, Savoy Ballroom 1931-38 and also a long residency at the Cotton Club. He also often performed for local dance marathons (Leo A. Seltzer's Walkathons).

In 1945 Tate retired from performing, opened his own studio with some degree of success, and began to teach music. Tate became one of the city's top instructors throughout the 1950s and 1960s (still teaching around 1971), but with the advent of modern jazz he found himself working in the post office.



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Left: Buster Bailey. A 'Midnight Ball given by the Vendome Orchestra, Saturday Night, Feb. 10' was advertised in the Chicago Defender in February 1923 - at the same time listing the band members (as being the ball committee): Erskine Tate. Freddie 'King' Keppard. James Tate. Fayette 'Fate' Williams. 'Buster' Bailey. A. C. Fernandez. Norvell Martin (Morton). D. K. Whitsett. Jos. McCutcheon. 'Saxo' Diemer. Adrian Robinson. 'Bill' Daniels. John H. Haire (Hare). James Bertrand. Altogether 14 alumni - although the advertisement states: "Chicago's premier organization - ten musicians - every man an artist".





Late 1925. From left most likely: Teddy Weatherford, Alvin Fernandez, Ed Wyer, Frank Ethridge, Will Armstrong, John Hare, Erskine Tate, poss. Paul "Stump" Evans, Jimmy Bertrand, Reuben Reeves (soon to be replaced by Louis Armstrong), James Tate, Eddie Atkins, Charles Harris, Norval/Norvelle "Flute" Morton. Chicago Defender, December 12, 1925: "Louis Armstrong has been engaged by E. Tate to play in the famous Vendome Theatre Orchestra. Mr. Armstrong is a versatile artist and will be an asset to this Orchestra." Norvelle Morton also doubled with Dickerson. So far, The Mississippi Rag/P. van Vorst 1979 survey has not been available for consideration.



This photo is taken sometime between December 1925 and June 1926. Erskine Tate's own identification (courtesy Bertrand Demeusy/Floyd Campbell) from left (back row): Ed Wyer, violin. Will Armstrong, cello. Clarence Lee, violin. Teddy Weatherford, piano. John Hare, helicon. Alvin Fernandez, clarinet. Frank Ethridge, violin. From left (front row): James Tate, trumpet. Louis Armstrong, trumpet. Eddie Atkins, trombone. Elliot Washington, banjo. Erskine Tate with baton. Jimmy Bertrand, drums. Paul "Stump" Evans, saxes. Charles Harris, saxes, and Norval/Norvelle "Flute" Morton, saxes.



This band photo is often shown in a mirrored version, making the fingering of instruments wrong. Angelo Fernandel might have been a Puerto Rican musician who Americanized his name to Alvin Fernandez - making it easier to obtain work and perhaps to fit better or to avoid racial insults. The violinist Juice Wilson played with Fernandez in Spain during the thirties - and described him as "the world's greatest" clarinetist. Chicago's many and continuously increasing number of blues and jazz composers used the bands of the cabaret floor shows, vaudevilles, and theatres to promote their latest songs - among them Erskine Tate. For instance, legend has it, that early on Tate's band launched a special arrangement of "Royal Garden Blues" (Clarence and Spencer Williams) to a fully packed Vendome house every night for some time. The orchestra was divided up into several sections, each hidden in different parts of the theatre hall, and when cued they started playing while moving toward the pit. The music business was exploding in every way and created a lot of jobs and engagements. Often the recording companies or the sheet music publishing houses arranged large concerts - events where virtually every band participated to plug new recordings or new sheet music releases. It is said that on the side Erskine Tate ran his own record store at 31<sup>st</sup> and Wabash - just one of many others stocking the new craze "race records". Often the records sold so fast that customers paid overprice to reserve copies of especially popular records/artists.

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### BENEFIT MUSICIANS UNION, LOCAL 208

HERE'S OUR CONTRACT TO POSITIVELY APPEAR!

My hand and I are all set to "stop" that show.  
*Jimmie Blue*

The old cornet is just itchin' to make blue music, mister, so I just can't stay away.  
*Louis Armstrong*

The old cornet is just itchin' to make blue music, mister, so I just can't stay away.

Will I be there? Just try and stop me—that's all!  
*Harry Stewart*

Will I be there? Just try and stop me—that's all!

Shouting is too good for the foolish person who tries to keep me and my boys away.  
*Eubank Tate*

Shouting is too good for the foolish person who tries to keep me and my boys away.

I wouldn't miss that night for love or money.  
*Clarence Williams*

I wouldn't miss that night for love or money.

My hand and I will be there with EVERYTHING.  
*Alvin Karpis*

When my hand and I get hot, boy, it's going to be "too bad."  
*L. H. Johnson*

When my hand and I get hot, boy, it's going to be "too bad."

Watch me speak that Steepleway, and my boys blow real blues.  
*Clarence Williams*

Watch me speak that Steepleway, and my boys blow real blues.

I'm saving my best for June 12th, so brother, tell the boys and girls I'll be there with my best.  
*Joseph K. Williams*

I'm saving my best for June 12th, so brother, tell the boys and girls I'll be there with my best.



You can tell the world that Butterbeans and Susie's gonna burn up the track to Chi for the big things.

I'm gonna paint that Coliseum blue-berries.  
*Bessie Coleman*



Can hardly wait for the big show to break loose. Wait'll you hear my latest waltz.  
*Arthur Chappo Hill*

Can hardly wait for the big show to break loose. Wait'll you hear my latest waltz.



Better tie the Coliseum down, 'cause we're all set to blow music as is music—and blow.  
*Richard M. Jones*

Better tie the Coliseum down, 'cause we're all set to blow music as is music—and blow.

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Wilson Music Shop	2062 E. 32d St.

# FROM "KIN TO KAN T"



A 1927 review (unlisted newspaper), found in Louis Armstrong's personal scrap-book, reads: "Erskine Tate's orchestra at the Vendome Theatre last week was a 'wow'. Louis Armstrong, who is one of (Heebie Jeebies') pet writers, led the members of the popular orchestra in a 'prayer' with his cornet. During his 'offering' he wore a high silk hat, frock-tail coat and smoked glasses. The fans are still giggling over the act as it was far the most amusing one ever seen here .... but when Luis (sic) sang "My Baby Knows How" to Charles Harris, who slipped a wig over his head and played the role of the baby that Luis was singing about, the fans laughed themselves dizzy. The number was the best Tate had offered since Luis 'preached the gospel' some weeks ago."



"Stump" Evans (right) - his nickname indicating his short stature - a hitherto rather mythical figure sometimes doubled with King Oliver arriving at about 11 p.m., after work at the Vendome had finished. Evans was one of Chicago's most promising saxophonists until tuberculosis killed him in 1928.

# ERSKINE TATE'S VENDOME SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA - DISCOGRAPHY

Discographies in book form have not yet included a brass bass player in the personnel for the 1923 recording session - close listening reveals that a brass bass is present (accentuating all 4 beats in the bar) - obviously John Hare, since he is in the 1921 photo as well as in the 1925/1926 photos. Adding several other corrections and dismissing rumors, a more correctly detailed discography would likely be:

**ERSKINE TATE'S VENDOME ORCHESTRA:** James "Jimmy" Tate, cor. Freddie Keppard, cor. Fayette Williams, trb. Alvin Fernandez, clt/poss.alt. Buster Bailey, clt/alt. Norval/Norvelle "Flute" Morton, ten. Poss. Raymond Whitsett, sax. Poss. Joseph McCutcheon, sax. Poss. Horace "Saxo" Diemer, alt/bar. Adrian Robinson, pno. 'Bill' Daniels(?), bjo. John Hare, bbs. James "Jimmy" Bertrand, dms. Erskine Tate, dir.

Chicago, June 23, 1923

8399-A	CUTIE BLUES	Okeh 4907, LAR A-4176
8400-A	CHINAMAN BLUES	Okeh 4907, LAR A-4176

NOTE: Erskine Tate has been listed as the banjoist and was known to play banjo, yet there is another banjo player in all three photos of the band - being the director, it is not very likely that ET was the banjo player as well. Six reedmen might have been with the band for the theater work, but seem to be too many for this session.

Albert McCarthy: Of considerably curiosity value is a review of these titles that appeared in the music and theatre weekly, New York Clipper, of August 31, 1923: "Erskine Tate's Orchestra debuts with this disk as a new Okeh recording combination. They hail from Chicago where the band is a feature of the Vendome Theatre in the Windy City's Ethiopian quarter. Played by a dusky aggregation, it is only to be expected that these "blues" bear the genuine African stamp from every angle. Corking for dance purposes, both." The review, discovered by Len Kunstadt during his researches into early musical publications, was written by Abel Green, who was later to be the dominant figure of the magazine Variety. It must be amongst the earliest notices of its kind. The slightly condescending attitude towards black musicians was commonplace at the time.

Keppard was playing everywhere in Chicago at this time as remembered by Earl Hines: "...musicians like Freddie Keppard ... were all gigging around, playing dances and in and out of these theatres ...".



**ERSKINE TATE'S VENDOME ORCHESTRA:** Probably: James "Jimmy" Tate, cor. Freddie Keppard, cor. Fayette Williams, trb. Alvin Fernandez, clt/poss.alt. Darnell Howard?, clt/alt. Norval/Norvelle "Flute" Morton, ten. Adrian Robinson, pno. Erskine Tate(?), bjo. John Hare, bbs. James "Jimmy" Bertrand, dms. Erskine Tate, dir.

Chicago, c. September, 1923

?	Unknown tune	Paramount rejected
?	Unknown tune	Paramount rejected

NOTE: This session was, according to Walter C. Allen, referred to in the Pittsburgh Courier of September 29, 1923. The number of titles actually recorded is not known. Buster Bailey had probably left the band (soon, early 1924, in transition to the Oliver band) at this point. Darnell Howard maintained that he recorded with Tate - this could be the occasion, Howard relieving Bailey (Howard was actually gigging in Chicago in the fall of 1923 between European tours. Further, he seems to have been with Tate late 1926-October 1927 and also sometime during 1929-31, but recordings are not known from these later periods). Bud Scott (bjo) insisted that he recorded with Tate, so this session - as well as June 23<sup>rd</sup> - are the possible dates.

**Erskine Tate's Vendome Orchestra:** James "Jimmy" Tate, tpt. Louis Armstrong, tpt. Eddie Atkins, trb. Alvin Fernandez, clt. Charles Harris, alt. Paul "Stump" Evans, alt/bar. Norval/Norvelle "Flute" Morton, ten. Teddy Weatherford, pno. Frank Ethridge or Elliot Washington, bjo. John Hare, bbs. James "Jimmy" Bertrand, poss. dms(1)/wbd(2). Erskine Tate, poss. vln/dir/ldr/shouting(3). Unknown, shouting(4).

Chicago, May 28 P.M., 1926

C-334, E3138W	Static Strut	Rejected
C-335, E3139W	Static Strut	Rejected
C-336, E3140W	Static Strut (1)	Voc 1027-A, 15372, <u>OrE 1004</u> , BrG A183, <u>Br 80061</u> , <u>BrE 03594</u>
C-337, E3141W	Stomp Off, Let's Go (2)(3)	Voc 1027-B, <u>OrE 1004 (some copies)</u> , <u>Br 03594 (some copies)</u>
C-338, E3142W	Stomp Off, Let's Go (2)(4)	Voc 1027-B, 15372, <u>OrE 1004</u> , BrG A183, <u>Br 80061</u> , <u>BrE 03594</u>

NOTE: A Decca shellac test of C-338/E3142W, showing matrix XYX1004B (probably dubbed from the Oriole issue) is owned by Ate van Delden. The Vocalion recording ledger states "10 men including leader" - judging from the number of band members shown in both the first and second photos from 1925/26, it was, under all circumstances, not the full regular Erskine Tate Vendome Theatre band recording at this session. James Tate's presence has been doubted, however, the opening brass breaks in Static Strut are played by 2 trumpets and trb, so James Tate is definitely present.

In 1969 it was suggested by John R. T. Davies/Laurie Wright that Johnny Dodds is on clarinet for C-337/338. Later on, someone further suggested Johnny St. Cyr to be the banjo player - the banjo is played well and in fact St. Cyr's method of obligato refinements and triplets are employed here and there. Although St. Cyr said he recorded with Tate (in a context where details are obviously mixed up), he never claimed to have made exactly these sides.

Lil Hardin has been suggested as the piano player - but she could not at all have executed these technically difficult solos. And finally, even Kid Ory has been squeezed in for the trombone parts.

No doubt such speculations stem from the fact that the immediate subsequent session (on the same day) was by Lill's Hot Shots (a Hot Five pseudonym). Erskine Tate himself has denied these - understandable, yet incorrect - assumptions several times.

A final reason to leave out the participation of the Hot Five members (except Armstrong, of course) is that Ory, Dodds, and St. Cyr were (morally) old fashioned proud professional musicians - likely they would not have played just for the fun of it. Also, union problems might have occurred - both Dodds and St. Cyr were seemingly always acting strictly to the union rules.

Some authorities believe there are two pianists present, but it sounds unlikely that two persons could co-ordinate the bass and treble piano parts (check the breaks), especially since the piano solo in Stomp Off is quite different from take to take - there is no doubt that Weatherford is the one and only pianist. Fayette Williams has been suggested for the trombone chair since he is on the Okeh recording, but two Chicago Defender reports of January 9/October 23, 1926 mention that Atkins is the trombonist with Erskine Tate. Finally, in a July 1975-interview (and a couple of other minor interviews), Erskine Tate himself confirms that the clarinet is Fernandez (who was a fine classical player as well), Ed Atkins the trombonist, and mentions that Ethridge, in addition to playing banjo, was a fine piano player as well.

Orally judged, the introductory shouting on C-337 and C-338 is done by two different persons. According to all discographies, the Hardin Hot Shots take numbers are C-340/E-3156W, C-341/E-3157W, and C-342/E-3158W. From Steve Lasker's Vocalion-"3-figure"/"C"-Masters listing it appears that take numbers used are C-339/E-3155W, C-340/E-3156W, C-341/E-3157W, and C-342/E-3158W. Consequently, there is no gap in matrix sequence and therefore not room for a third take of Stomp Off - there is no reason to doubt Lasker's findings since he was granted a very special privilege of examining the archives at MCA/CBS to study the recording files of Brunswick-Vocalion.



The rare take of "Stomp Off" was pressed on cylinder (prob. In Germany) around 2018.



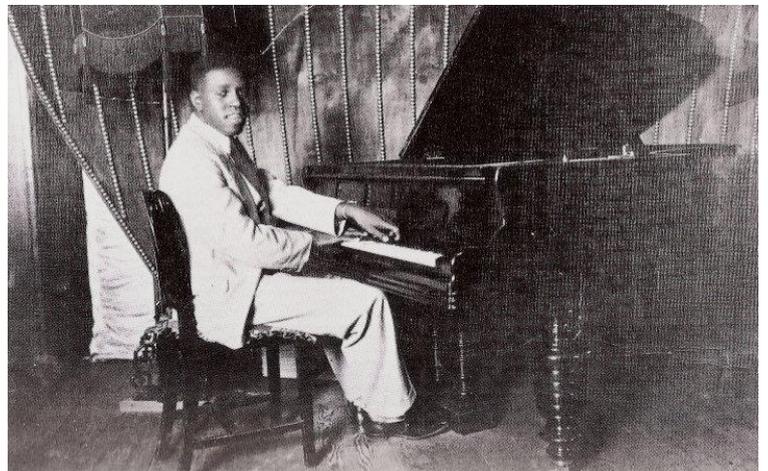
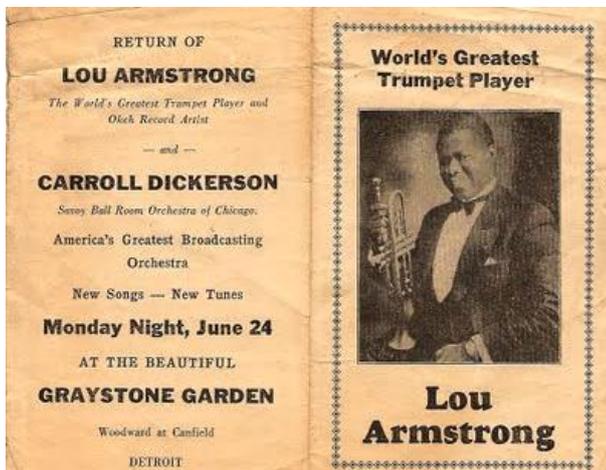
It is not only Louis Armstrong improvising on the two different takes of "Stomp Off" - also Weatherford is showing off a bit. So much in fact that it becomes quite clear (when listening to bars 15-16 in Weatherford's solos) that two piano players could not together - in the spur of the moment - have improvised the harmonic and rhythmic changes from take E3141W to take E3142W. Therefore, it is obvious that Weatherford alone is responsible for the piano playing - there is no second piano player present.

It may be said that "the piano work is certainly well within the scope of one talented pianist" - quite an understatement, however. In those days it would take no less than a top-class musician considering the speed, the bass part, and that the pianist is constantly spreading out over three and a half octaves while at the same time employing double octaves in the right hand. Weatherford could manage (although some said he couldn't reach a tenth - considering Weatherford's huge hands this seems unlikely), but it was certainly not allotted every talent to master the complicated figures he is firing off to perfection with seemingly little effort, even if his solo output viewed as a whole may not be termed jazz in the fullest sense of that meaning. And listen: None other than Louis is running out of power control for a few short moments - consequently full marks to Weatherford for his supreme and invariable excellence.

That said there is of course no doubt that Armstrong's heroic taking chances and hot blowing must have been a tremendous inspiration to the other band members - which shows. Static Strut and Stomp Off are on fire.



Likely, this is a genuine test pressing of "Static Strut"



While with Erskine Tate early in the evening, late in the evening Armstrong doubled with Lil Hardin's band at the Dreamland and later on joined Carroll Dickerson's instead

Teddy Weatherford - born Bluefield, West Virginia 1903, lived in New Orleans 1915-20, learning to play piano. Moved to Chicago 1920; extensive gigging, then first with Jimmy Wade and from September 1925 to July 1926 with Tate

Also, at no time Bertrand is definitely heard playing drums - he is probably handling washboard and woodblocks and adding a few cymbal-strikes. It would not be possible for him to remove his washboard/thimbles, change to drums, and one chorus later on remount the washboard outfit ready to beat out his breaks. The thimbles would fall off his fingers while reaching for the drumsticks etc. Bertrand made other recordings for Vocalion with smaller groups where it can advantageously be studied how he is using a washboard furnished with a woodblock and a cymbal.

In the second photo of the Tate band, a baritone saxophone is displayed on the floor in front of the sax section, so it is right probably a baritone solo (as stated in Rust) on "Static Strut" and not, as at that time (and used by Tate earlier on) the more usual bass saxophone being featured.

Regarding Stump Evans, it is not fully verified that he is in the first photo (1925) while he is definitely in the second (1926). A baritone sax is not visible in the first photo. Therefore, Evans could very well be the baritone player since the other reed players in the second photo are almost certainly seen in the first photo as well. If so, Alvin Fernandez might be the alto/C-melody soloist as noted in Rust. The tenor sax is heard improvising underneath some ensemble parts. Otherwise, the remaining saxes (rather clearly seen on the floor in the second photo) are looking more like C-melody saxes than Eb altos except for the tenor sax, of course.

Bryan Krefft: Opened in 1919 on Chicago's South Side, the Vendome Theater was the premier African-American theater in the city prior to the Regal Theater opening nearly a decade later. It was built in the style of the French Renaissance for the O.C. Hammond circuit made up of several smaller theaters scattered over the South Side of Chicago, including the Elba Theater, Fountain Theater and Pickford Theater. The Vendome Theater could seat over 1,250 in its auditorium, amidst marble, gilded plasterwork, crystal chandeliers and frescoes on its walls. It had the largest stage of any theater on Chicago's South Side until the Regal Theater opened. The price tag of the Vendome Theater was reportedly over a quarter million dollars. A \$10,000 pipe organ was installed and the theater would have a 10-piece house orchestra.

The Hammond family wanted to allow African-Americans the chance to experience the feeling of being transported to another place and time that movie theaters gave whites who patronized the Loop and North Side palaces, but which blacks had limited or no access to in those days. Chicago's leading African-American paper, the Defender, praised the Vendome Theater in an opening day article, stating that "all its employees will be folks of Color" and "the new theater will mean much to the folks of this district." Almost as soon as it opened, the Vendome Theater became the most popular destination for African-Americans to see first-run films, elaborate stage revues, and performances by the biggest names in jazz in the

country. The Vendome Theater was also one of the only theaters in Chicago which screened so-called "race pictures", films made by black directors, with black casts, addressing primarily black issues. At the same time, the Vendome Theater also featured films highlighting the accomplishments of black soldiers who had fought in WWI. These films would be a staple on the Vendome Theater's screen through the 1920's.

The leader of the Vendome Orchestra, Erskine Tate, had originally been at an older Hammond theater, the Phoenix Theater. During the 1920's and into the 1930's, the Vendome Theater was almost as popular for its orchestra as its films, and had packed houses. However, by the early-1930's, the Vendome Theater began to slowly decline. The opening of the Regal Theater in 1928 which was far larger and grandiose, began to pull patrons away. The Regal Theater would follow the Vendome Theater's example of first-run features, live stage shows and especially A-list jazz stars appearing on stage. The Vendome Theater was closed in the late-1930's, and the vacant theater was demolished in 1949.

## ERSKINE TATE'S VENDOME SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA - NOTES

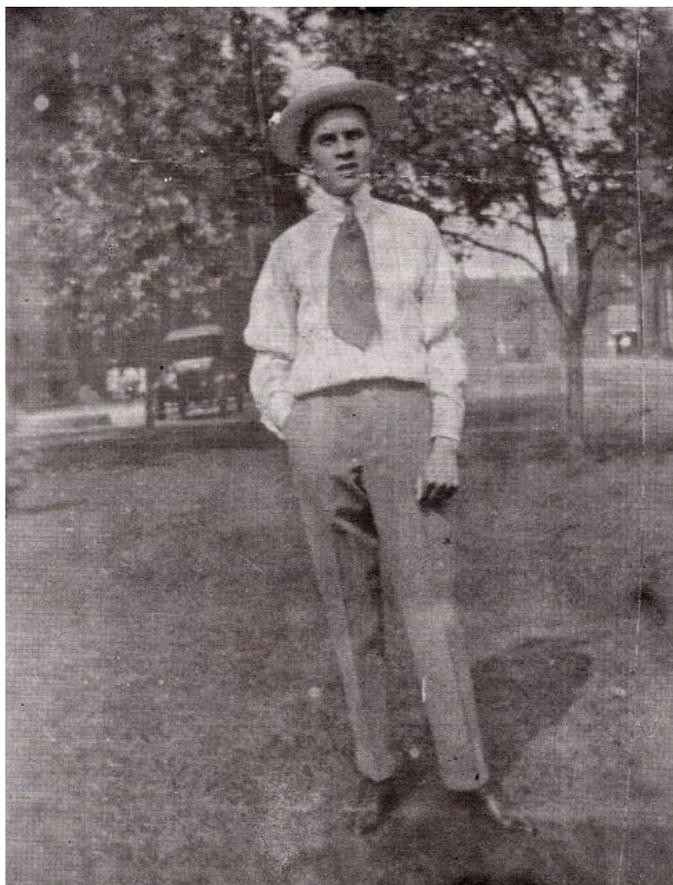
(A few of the below pieces of information are contradicting - not everybody has a completely clear remembrance)

Albert McCarthy: Pianist Paul Banks, born in Kansas City before the turn of the century . . . went to Chicago with a road show during WWI ... and was impressed by bands like Erskine Tate's!!

LBR: As for Walter Henri Dyett (playing banjo with Tate), see Jazz Institute of Chicago [www.jazzinchicago.org/educates/journal/articles/captain-walter-henri-dyett-1901-1969](http://www.jazzinchicago.org/educates/journal/articles/captain-walter-henri-dyett-1901-1969)

Albert McCarthy: Jimmy Mundy had a remarkably varied musical experience beginning in 1919 (*Mundy was born 1907!!*) . . . a year or two later found him in Chicago where he worked with Carroll Dickerson and Erskine Tate. (*Other sources have Mundy in the band during the late 20ties*).

Andrew "Andy" Blakeney: I started studying at W. L. Jackson's School of Music in Chicago in 1919 - he was Erskine Tate's stepfather - where I was taught all the light classics. After I was attending three years, I organized me a little high school band of my own ...."



James "Jimmy" Bertrand (born Biloxi, Miss., 1900), late 20'ties, highly renowned drummer. A cousin of George Filhé and Andrew Hilaire; moved to Chicago 1913 and studied with Erskine Tate's father Bill Cussack. With Tate 1918-28. Extensive teaching. Pupils a.o. Lionel Hampton and Big Sid Catlett. New Orleans drummer Minor Hall returned to Chicago in August 1921 after his disagreement with King Oliver in California (concerning violinist Jimmie Palao being fired). While employed by Jimmie Noone, he exchanged ideas with drummer/percussionist Jimmy Bertrand. Hall related that he taught "New Orleans Rhythm" to Bertrand in exchange for lessons on how to read music. Lee Collins: "Bertrand's trouble was whiskey and women!"

Happy Caldwell remembered that Buster Bailey, his cousin, worked in Tate's pit band for a while and at the same time took lessons at the Tate family music school.

Happy Caldwell studied at the Tate music school as well: Erskine Tate, he had seventeen pieces and was playing all those big overtures and music for the pictures. Stump Evans started on C-melody and used to play trombone too.

*(Buster Bailey participated in a much heralded Erskine Tate Orchestra trip to New York - so far details not known).*

Milt Hinton/David Berger: During the early twenties, when I was growing up, the Southside was unbelievable from a musical standpoint. It probably had to do with the fact that during this time there were three times as many blacks in Chicago as New York. I once heard that by the middle twenties there were eight hundred thousand blacks, who made up about a quarter of the city's population. Of course, it happened because there were more new jobs available in Chicago, and since it's much more centrally located than New York, it was easier to get to from the South by railroad.

The size of the black population during this period also meant the Southside had three times as many theatres and nightclubs as New York. The Vendome and the Grand Theatre were in my neighbourhood and they had pit bands with strings, tympanies, and great trumpet players. There were ballrooms and nightclubs. During the early twenties, all the action seemed to be centred around South State Street between 26<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup>. There were places like the Royal Gardens, a big club called the Entertainer's, and places like the Elite Club, and the Panama and Dreamland Cafés. By the middle twenties blacks had moved further south and the club scene shifted along with them. There was the Sunset Café, the Apex, and the Plantation Café, all located around 35<sup>th</sup> and Calumet.

Starting from the time I came to Chicago in 1919, I'd spend my Sunday afternoons seeing a live show and a silent movie at one of those theatres. Dave Peyton had the orchestra at the Grand Theatre . . . I liked Erskine Tate's Orchestra at the Vendome much better. I think he had that job for about ten years and at one time or another he must've brought in every good musician around Chicago.

Harry Dial: The second week in August 1923 Dewey Jackson, Charles Lawson, and myself took five days off from Fate Marable's Band and went to Chicago. Erskine Tate was in the Vendome Theatre. They played for the picture, then gave a

concert lasting about an hour. Some of the regular men in the band were Reuben and Gerald Reeves, trumpet and trombone. Tate's brother played the other trumpet; in the string section, Wright Smith and Wyatt Houston, violins, Lawrence Dixon from the Stewart band played cello, and there were others in the string section but I don't remember their names. Jimmy Bertrand was the drummer and he was one helluva drummer. Teddy Weatherford, pianist, Louis Armstrong, and a saxophonist named "Stump" Evans, were three men hired to play in the concert, they did not play for the picture. Those three fellows along with Jimmy Bertrand on xylophone were a tremendous show and the house was packed every night. Teddy, Louis, Dixon, and "Stump" had other jobs in cafés around town for they were through in the theatre by ten o'clock. It was my first time seeing a black band being conducted by a leader using a baton.

*(Of course, the above-mentioned musicians could not all have been with Tate at the same time and further not all have been with the band during August 1923. Harry Dial must be mixing together several different occasions).*

According to Chicago Defender, Weatherford left Jimmy Wade around September 1925 to join Erskine Tate, and "Stump" Evans followed him there in late 1925 or early 1926. Tate himself recalled that Teddy, Stump, and Eddie South were in a group (Wade's) at one of the clubs, and he tried to get all three of them - but he missed out on South.

Louis Armstrong/Robert Goffin (Goffin, having complete access to Armstrong's private notebooks, scrapbooks, and confidences, dramatized his LA biography, so not all details may be exact. On the other hand, it was via the information in Goffin's book that Armstrong's correct birth date was finally traced):

One night as Louis was leaving the Dreamland, a voice hailed him: "You Louis Armstrong?" "Sure, Pops! What's your name?" "I'm Erskine Tate, and I'd like to have a little talk with you. I conduct the orchestra at the Vendome Theatre." "Yes, I know. My wife'll be here in a minute, if you'll wait." "I'd rather see you alone." "All right," Louis agreed. "I'll be with you in five minutes at the corner cafeteria."

Louis went over to tell Lil, but she seemed not to hear him. Snow was falling, an icy wind blew, and when Louis entered the cafeteria, he was glad to find himself in cozy warmth. *(This seems to confirm that Armstrong joined Tate in the winter time and not as late as May, as Louis himself once stated.)* Erskine Tate was already drinking hot coffee gratefully.

"Dipper," he said, "I've got a proposition for you. How much do you get at the Dreamland?" "Seventyfive bucks a week." "How would you like to boost that by fifty?" Always slow to make up his mind and pledge his word, Louis rolled his eyes and shook his head doubtfully. "Could be," he replied noncommittally. "How would you like to play solo in my band? Keep your Dreamland job, too, of course?"

Louis' heart stopped beating. Impossible! Erskine Tate's orchestra was a symphonic ensemble of some twenty professional musicians. Why, you had to be at least a conservatory graduate before you could hope to play with such an ensemble! Louis asked for further details, wanted to know exactly what would be expected of him, demurred at giving an immediate answer. "But I've got to know today, Dipper." "Nothin' shakin', Erskine. Gotta talk it over with Lil."

Louis reached home late that night, and Lil was asleep. When he woke her, she sat up startled, and listened to his rush of words. He had a proposition: to double up at the Vendome Theatre. Ought he to accept it? Was he good enough to take the job? Wouldn't he make a fool of himself? "Of course, you've got to take it, Louis. If you don't, I'll skin you alive. Do you realize what it means? They didn't ask King Oliver - they came to you!"

Several days later Louis came for Lil shortly after dusk. "Where are we going?" she asked. "You'll see." The snow lay dark and wet in the streets, and the slippery pavements made hard walking. As they reached a corner, Louis stopped short, catching Lil by the arm and pointing with his free hand. In the darkness settling over the city, she saw the Vendome Theatre's green sign. Below the huge luminous letters marking the theatre, Erskine Tate's name was spelled out in red lights, and just below: LOUIS ARMSTRONG. Lil screamed with delight, and even Louis himself could hardly believe it. Arm in arm they walked slowly toward the marquee and stood looking up at the sign for a long while, stamping their feet to keep warm. They wondered why the whole world did not stop and gather here to stare in admiration at the triumph of the black man whose star was rising in the sky of fame - TRUMPET: LOUIS ARMSTRONG.



Lil Hardin had quite an impact on Louis' career and thereby in fact on several of the Chicago/New York top bands' dispositions. It seems likely that Armstrong was with Erskine Tate from December 1925 until he formed his own band "The Stompers" c. February 1927.

On beginning his new engagement, Louis - at Erskine's suggestion - discarded the good old cornet and bought a shiny trumpet. When he sat down at the music-stand for the first time, a cowboy picture was unreeling on the screen, hero

chasing villain hell-for-leather across wild country. It was a silent picture, of course, and the orchestra's soft playing kept pace with the action.

At the end of the film, it was the orchestra's turn to appear on the stage to render classical pieces. These ended in a flourish when Louis Armstrong was singled out by a crisscross of coloured spotlights playing on him - an experience he had never had before. He sensed that Lil, in her seat in the front row, was watching him, holding him in check; perhaps she was a little envious of glory that she could not share directly. Louis blinked as he moved towards the footlights. He felt but could not see the countless pairs of eyes turned on him by the faceless crowd, lost in the darkness of the vast theatre. Yet by degrees, as his eyes grew accustomed to the lights and shadows, he began to make out some features. He experienced the same poignant emotion that had gripped him three years earlier when he had arrived one night at the Lincoln Gardens to play with King Oliver. And now, he was a star in his own right and was climbing higher than all those he cared for.

The melody played by the orchestra - Spanish Shawl - was throbbing in Louis' veins. Not that he was fond of this particular piece - it did not allow him to develop the abrupt power of his personality, and there was a vague suggestion of Carmen about it that irritated him somewhat. Suddenly he broke the contact and stood alone before the audience, blowing like one possessed. Eyes closed, he felt himself borne to heaven on the wings of inspiration, and came down to earth only when a thunder of applause brought him back to reality.

All the lights were on, and he felt hopelessly trapped in the projectors' beams. Lil, due at the Dreamland before him, had left after waving to him in triumph. The spectators were wild with joy. Never had Louis received such an ovation and his heart pounded to the core. Erskine Tate made a sign to him, and the orchestra struck up the theme song. Then time stood still once more. Louis shed all restraint and played. He was a pure musical spirit freed of all earthly ties. When he had taken repeated bows, he gave two more encores of Spanish Shawl. Each time his triumph was greater than before. Erskine Tate was jubilant: "You see, Louis - I was right to make you change instruments."

There was a change of program at the Vendome twice a week. Louis usually finished playing at the Vendome about eleven. One evening, a man who was destined to play an important part in his life was waiting for him at the theatre exit. "You're Louis Armstrong?" "Yeah, an' who's you, Pops?" "Joe Glaser. I'm the owner of the Sunset. I've got a spot for you and Earl Hines in Carroll Dickerson's Orchestra." Shortly afterward, Louis and Earl were playing at the Sunset - and the establishment soon found its receipts soaring and the customers flocking to hear the new attractions.

After some time, Louis Armstrong resigned from the Vendome's show.

Doc Cheatham: It was Louis who was the rage - featured with Erskine Tate's Orchestra at the Vendome. He was there for quite some time. One day Louis came to the Dreamland and asked me to sub for him one evening at the Vendome. Arriving about half an hour before the show, Jimmy Tate asked me what I was doing there? I told him, and Jimmy ran through the charts with me, the music for the movie as well as the feature specialties.

The show began, and there was standing room only. About that time, Louis was being featured on a tune called "Poor Little Rich Girl", which I knew by heart, because I had spent every nickel I had going to the Vendome listening to Louis. Well, we got to the point in the show when it was time for Louis' feature. The light in the pit went up, and the band swung into "Poor Little Rich Girl". The people were screaming and hollering for Louis, and as I stood up they screamed "Louis! Louis!"

When they got a good look at me, the screaming died right away to nothing. Then and there, I wished there was a hole in the floor and I was small enough to fit through it. But although I wasn't yet a good jazz player, I knew my horn, and I played fine, playing Louis' part. I played it like I played it, because nobody in the world could do it like Louis. I guess Erskine must have been satisfied, because I subbed for Louis again a couple of times more.

The band at the Vendome did not receive me very well. I didn't care, because I knew I was going to get something to eat, and I hadn't been eating anything. I got \$85 for that job. But I was curious why Louis had sent for me, and why the band seemed hostile. I said to myself, "With all those guys around here, like George Mitchell, Natty Dominique, all hanging around, why did he choose me?"

I didn't learn until years later when I was working with Johnny Guarneri on a concert. He was a very great friend of Louis, and he told me what Louis had told him. Apparently, Louis felt the other New Orleans musicians didn't treat him



right. So, it was an unwritten law, he didn't hire them, he hired me instead. It didn't really matter to Louis who I was, he didn't care much what I did, he just hired me. Anyway, I thought it was very nice to be given that chance.

Leon "Scotty" Scott (trumpet): Another fellow around Chicago was Erskine Tate at the Vendome, when they used to have pictures. That was beautiful, a real good job. I worked with Tate for a while. They used to have five pieces. In the intermission between reels Louis would be in the balcony or somewhere. Suddenly he'd burst out playing and everybody would be surprised and they'd look up and see Louis there. All five were in the balcony, they'd bring the house down.

Milt Hinton/David Berger: I'd see Teddy Weatherford playing piano, the great clarinet player Barney Bigard, and a percussionist named Jimmy Bertrand. I remember we'd sit there in amazement when he'd play the melody to a blues called "My Daddy Rocks Me" on tympany. Evidently, in those days he was about the only black guy around who could play all the percussion instruments and I've heard he's the one who taught Lionel Hampton about xylophone.

Louis Armstrong was also in the pit. I can still see him standing up, next to Erskine Tate, for the finale. He'd always bring the house down. And then they'd show the movie.

Albert McCarthy: One of Armstrong's routines consisted of his donning a frock coat and announcing himself as the "Reverend Satchelmouth". This was the preamble to a mock preacher act, for many years a staple of coloured vaudeville shows.

Weatherford quit Tate and opened at the Dreamland not long before he left for the Orient on August 31, 1926, with Jack Carter's Band. Carter also recruited Frank Ethridge. Albert Nicholas: "Teddy Weatherford, piano . . . he was a hell of a pianist . . . man, he was like, well . . . I hear Fats Waller and I tell you, it's Weatherford. Weatherford was a *musician* - he played rhapsodies, blues, and all those classics. First in Tate's Band . . . that was the band he was staying with. When he left that - man, Tate tried out about seven piano players and none could fill the job! Earl Hines couldn't make it!

*(Obviously, the last statement is exaggerated! Earl Hines: "... I eventually ended up playing with Erskine Tate after Teddy Weatherford left.)"*



Earl Hines 1926

McCarthy: In 1924, Earl Hines went to Chicago for the first time, and within three years was securely established there through working with Carroll Dickerson, Erskine Tate, and other leaders.

Earl Hines/Stanley Dance: Erskine Tate was across the street (from Elite No. 2, between 35<sup>th</sup> and State Street, where I was working) at the Vendome Theater, where they showed movies - no sound - and had live musicians. He used to get script and music sent him with the film. There would be several themes about eight or sixteen bars long, which were used for changes of scene, as when a door closed and the characters went outside. These were known as one-finger theme, two-finger theme, three-finger

theme, four-finger theme, and so on. If he held out his fourth finger, it meant they had to go to the fourth theme for, say, cloudiness in the sky and to get ready for a rough section of the music. The third finger would be for birds flying before a love scene. The themes let us know we were going into a different type of music. All this music was sent in, and the reason I'm talking about it is that I eventually ended up playing with Erskine Tate after Teddy Weatherford left. Watching him (Tate) was how I learned to conduct an orchestra. He was my coach, and what a way he had of conducting! His arm and finger movements, his concentration - he was terrific and it was beautiful to watch him. I used to sit right under him. Louis Armstrong and I were there together, and from the Vendome we went to our regular work.

Charlie Carpenter/Stanley Dance: Now since 1925 Louis Armstrong had been like a brother to me. He bought me my first Boy Scout suit. My folks used to take me with them on Saturday night to the old Vendome Theatre. Of course, I really wanted to go to the movies to see William S. Hart in action. But it was at the Vendome I first saw this cornet player stand up and sing. A girl came out on the little stage behind Erskine Tate's band and began to sing a chorus of Big Butter and Egg Man. She was Mae Alix and she looked like white. Then this fat guy with the cornet jumped up and said, "Hey, mama, mama, I'm you' big butter and egg man from 'way down in the South." Later, I learned this was Louis Armstrong.

Albert McCarthy: Soon after the last recording, Weatherford and Fernandez (*and Ethridge!*) left the band and were replaced by Walther Johnson and an unknown musician. Armstrong's predecessor, Reuben Reeves, returned to play with Tate for a few months from mid-1927. Reeves: "Erskine Tate had the best band I ever played with. He was a master, and the people used to stand for hours applauding. After each rendition, there was a five to ten minutes wait for the applause to stop. People came through storms, snow, and hail to hear Tate's orchestra." McCarthy: Allowing for a slight exaggeration, Reeves' remarks only confirm what others have said of Tate's popularity. Apparently, it was quite commonplace for people to come for the stage show and leave without seeing the film.

From around March 1928, Freddy Keppard made a brief return to the band, just a couple of months or so - the Chicago Defender also singles out William Tyler and Jimmy Bertrand. Violinist Eddie South was present from the autumn of 1927 until January 1928. From 1928 until 1930, both clarinetist/saxophonist Omer Simeon and drummer Wallace Bishop were regular members at the Metropolitan Theatre. At some point in 1929, trumpeter Jabbo Smith was in; "Stump" Evans had been forced to leave the band early 1928 as a result of illness - at that time banjoist/guitarist Bud Scott was present for the second of two brief stays.

In 1929 the personnel consisted of Bob Shoffner (doubled with Earl Hines. Hines' band rehearsed Tuesday and Fridays; Tate's Mondays and Thursdays), James Tate, trumpet. Lewis Taylor, trombone. Vance Dixon, Omer Simeon, clarinet/alto saxophone. Kenneth Anderson, tenor saxophone. Jerome Carrington, piano. Quinn Wilson, brass bass. Walter Bishop, drums. The smaller size of the band probably reflects the onset of the depression years.

Quinn Wilson/Stanley Dance: Then I had a chance to go into the Vendome Theatre where Erskine Tate's orchestra was playing for silent films, so I had to go back to my old band instructor at high school, and he taught me bass violin. I had to learn it in two weeks, because you got only two weeks' notice in those days. By the time I went in the theatre, I was playing string bass! It was easy really, the violin training helped. I started a little arranging when I was with Tate. Omer Simeon worked with me in Erskine Tate's band at the Vendome, and I've wonderful memories of him. He was a nice, quiet fellow, a very good musician, but he didn't get the recognition as an alto player he should have had. He was a fine first man in the section.

Omer Simeon 1931

Wallace Bishop/Stanley Dance: I got a job in 1927 with Omer Simeon's brother, Al Simeon, a violin player, who worked at a place called The Farm, a roadhouse outside Chicago. From there I went with Erskine Tate from 1928 to 1931, at the Metropolitan Theatre - an enormous band of no less than seventeen men. Among them were Omer Simeon and Darnell Howard, Louis Taylor and John Thomas (trb), Quinn Wilson, Vance Dickson, Bob Shoffner, and Jerome Carrington who played piano and handled the vocals.

According to Chicago Defender, Golden Lily Club (on 55th near the el), Chicago, staged an evening in tribute to Fats Waller on October 13, 1930 - among others the Erskine Tate band was scheduled to appear (rumours has it that Waller even played in Tate's band, so far not verified).

Chicago Defender May 1930: Freddie Keppard, the wizard cornetist, better known as 'King Keppard', is back in the limelight again. He was one of the reasons why the International Harvester's Dance was a success last Saturday night. This dance was played by Erskine Tate and his band, augmented by Chauncy Murdock, 'Red' Pinckney, Fegin, and Keppard. Playing this engagement places another star in the crown of Local 208, and Tate, as this is the first time a race band has ever played this particular engagement. Every one left the hall happy. Well, the boys did keep things 'hot and bothered'!



McCarthy: The groups that Tate led at a number of ballrooms during the early thirties are not well documented, and by all accounts the personnel changes were frequent. However, Elmer Crumbley has reported that when he was with Tate at the Savoy Ballroom, Chicago, for a short time in 1932, the other musicians in the band included, at different times, Raymond Hobson, Guy Kelly, Doll Vine, trumpet. Jimmy "Hooks" Hutchinson (early 1932), tenor saxophone. Teddy Wilson, Zinky Cohn, Cassino Simpson (also reported as being in 1930), Jerome Carrington, piano. Milton Hinton, bass,

and Pete Brown, drums. The fact that Charlie Beal also worked with Tate during 1932 indicates a great deal of change among piano players.



Erskine Tate, later years

Earl Hines/Stanley Dance: On Sundays, the Grand Terrace was let off to social clubs from 4 to 7 o'clock. Ed Fox used to bring in other bands on those Sundays, like Erskine Tate's, and have them play a few numbers, and I think Fox thought Erskine had a better band than ours. He asked Guy Lombardo what he thought about Erskine's band, and Guy laughed at him and told him it was ridiculous to make the comparison.

Milt Hinton: Every summer, Earl Hines would break up his band and the Grand Terrace would close.

Earl Hines: Fox wouldn't extend my contract for more than a year and closed the place (Grand Terrace) during the bad months, but then he found out that Chicago was a convention city and decided to stay open. So when we were out on the road, he brought in other bands. First Erskine Tate's, then Fletcher Henderson's, and later Count Basie's for a little while. *(Hines is mistaken as to the hiring of the Tate Band - Fox was probably forced by the Union to hire local bands in exchange for featuring out-of-town bands.)*

In 1934, the Sunset Café sometimes tried out two bands, such as Erskine Tate's and Carroll Dickerson's, in an effort to attract customers.

Milt Hinton/David Berger: During the middle thirties I got hired by Erskine Tate to do one night a week at the Savoy Ballroom. At this point in his career, he was still well known around Chicago, but he didn't have the same kind of fame he once did. Of course, that meant he couldn't demand the same kind of money either.

There was a union rule that required clubs to hire local guys whenever they brought in a name band from out of town. So when Andy Kirk, Earl Hines, or Fletcher Henderson came to the Savoy, Erskine Tate was brought in as the Sunday relief band to play during intermission.

Tate had always used a tuba, but for some reason when his tuba player quit, he decided to replace him with a string bass. From what I heard later, he hired me because I was willing to work cheaply. He'd managed to get some good local musicians, guys like Richard Barnet, Guy Kelly, Bob Shoffner, Scoville Browne, Ed Burke, and Jerome Pasquall.

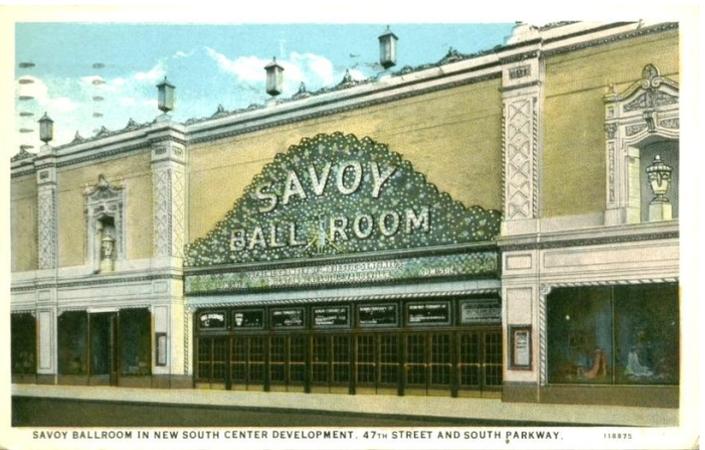
The first time I rehearsed with the band was at the Savoy. The place was a one-story building and I came in through the main entrance on South Parkway. Of course, I'd been there before, but never when the place was completely empty. So when I got inside, I was overwhelmed by the size of the dance floor. All the guys were setting up on the stage at the other end of the building and it looked like they were two blocks away.

I lifted my bass and started walking towards them. But as I got closer it was clear that some of the guys were staring in my direction, whispering and laughing. Even in those days the bass was still a pretty new instrument, especially for dance bands. I remember trying to figure out what was going on as I made the long walk to the stage. Maybe to some people unfamiliar things seem funny, I thought. Whatever it was, crossing the room that way made me the center of attention and it seemed to last forever.

When I finally got about fifteen feet from the stage, the drummer Richard Barnet yelled out, "Oh shit, here comes another nigger with a bass fiddle." They all broke up and the tremendous tension I was feeling suddenly ended. Of course, it also helped to have some friends in the band.

Erskine Tate was a tight guy. I'm not exactly sure why - maybe it had something to do with the way his career was going in those days. The union set the scale at eighteen dollars and there was always a delegate around to see that we got our money. But Tate worked out a way to try to reduce his costs. After rehearsal on Monday nights, he'd take each guy aside and ask him for six dollars back.

Fortunately, Richard Barnet tipped me off. He told me, "The first time he asks you for money back tell him no and he'll never ask again." Tate did ask and the advice I got really worked.



McCarthy: Trumpeter McClure (sic) "Red Mack" Morris (also working as drummer) rejoined Charlie Echols in Los Angeles c. 1935 . . . after playing with Erskine Tate in Chicago.

McLure "Red Mack" Morris: "I got back with Gene Coy in late 1933 .... I must have worked with him around six months to a year. We went all the way (from up-and-down-the-coast in California) to Chicago ... and played the Savoy Ballroom. Erskine Tate had a big band, fifteen/sixteen pieces, they was up there in tuxedos, evrything first-class, and we was playing intermission for them. I tried to imitate Pops (Louis Armstrong) .... That's what got me a break with Erskine. He said, "Boy, you around? I might able to use you." I said, "Yessir," and he gave me his card. So next day, I called him."

Peter Vacher: "Erskine Tate enjoyed a prominent position in Chicago's segregated music scene ... His band played regularly at the Savoy Ballroom in the early 1930s, and Red (Morris) was on Tate's payroll in 1933." (This doesn't quite correspond with McLure Morris' own time estimation, so maybe it would be nearer mid-1934. In another statement Vacher mentions that it could have been 1934).

McLure "Red Mack" Morris: "Erskine had two or three bands working under his name, and his mother was teaching piano. I went and saw Erskine, and I joined him ... I rehearsed and rehearsed with Erskine. He would send a kiddie to pick me up and take me to the gig. I didn't know about it at the time, but Erskine took care of me that way. This was not his main band, not his big band, so we'd play the gig and he'd bring me back. Finally, Erskine went to the Union for me, took me there with him. The president said, "No, hell, no. He can't play here. He's gotta be around six months." Anyway, Erskine took care of me until he finally got me in his main outfit, and we opened at the old Vendome Theatre on State Street. We had five brass, Vernell Yorke was on trumpet with me. Vernell Yorke was on dope ... we was smokin' brown stuff ... and I was drinkin' ... up to a fifth a day ... and I thought I had it captured ... this night he (Yorke) brought some black stuff and I'm taking my three draws, but I ain't never got on stage .... They had to drag me back in the dressing room, and when I start coming 'round, the doctor was standing over me. Erskine had called the doctor, and he mixed something up, looked like soapsuds to me ... I could hear this doctor, "Who's this boy's people? You better call his people." I ain't got no people; I'm by myself, and you talk about praying? You ain't never prayed like I prayed. He said, "Well, don't move him." I slept in the theater all night, and the musicians and the watchman, they was all lookin' out for me. I promised the Lord, "Let me get up now and I'll go straight home."

Next morning, when I start to coming 'round, I said I'm going home. "Oh, man, you just had a bad trip," they said, but I made up my mind. I had saved enough to get on the steam train, so I packed up my horn and walked off. The Union fined me and put me out because you're supposed to play your notice out ...".

February 13, 1937 another Chicago Defender sponsored charity event was announced. This time it was a dance to be held that Saturday night at the Savoy Ballroom, in aid of the victims of the recent floods, featuring various bands, among others Erskine Tate's.

Billboard Advertisement, Savoy Ballroom, Chicago, "Mammoth Jam Session" organized by Local 208 (black musicians), May 1938 (prob. May 16). Featuring about 25 bands, a.o. Fletcher Henderson, Erskine Tate, Mrs. Louis Armstrong (Lil Hardin), Jimmie Noone, Willie Bryant, Tiny Parham, and Johnny Dodds.

McCarthy: The last known reference to a Tate's band dates from early 1940, when he led his "Walkathon Boys" - the only musicians mentioned were George Hunt, trombone, and Hillard Brown, drums.

*(Other sidemen reported at various times: Isac L. "Ikey" Robinson. Preston Jackson (c. 1930). Francis "Doc" Whitby (c. 1934/35 at Coliseum, Chicago, the band playing for ice skating). Harold Baker.)*



In 1948, even the booming club scene could not save the great old Chicago landmarks like the Vendome Theatre (demolished 1949, to make way for the expanding Illinois Institute of Technology).

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Later newspaper ad

Some of the above uncredited bits of information plus photos have been extracted from Laurie Wright's "Storyville" magazine, Esquire's Jazz Books from the 40'ties, "Black Beauty, White Heat"/Driggs & Lewine, "Jazz Music in Chicago's Early South-side Theaters"/Charles A. Sengstock Jr., "Swingin' on Central Avenue" / Peter Vacher / Rowman & Littlefield / Maryland 2015, and various smaller notes in a number of biographies.

Additional/related material:



Walter Henry Dyett, tutor, later years

Read more about Walter Henry Dyett [http://palmtavern.bizland.com/palmtavern/Walter\\_Dyett.htm](http://palmtavern.bizland.com/palmtavern/Walter_Dyett.htm)



WHD in Pasadena 1915

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George Robert Orendorff, trumpet: " ... most of my work (c. 1923) was playing show music, in the pit. My teacher, Raymond Whitsett, played at the Grand Theatre, and he taught me how to play both ways. Of course, he was a legit trumpet player but he could play jazz, too ...".