GEORGE LEWIS AND TURK MURPHY AT NEWPORT

AT 8:30 PM ON JULY 4, 1957, THE FOURTH ANNUAL NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL GOT UNDER WAY. Willis Conover, the Voice of America's jazz spokesman, and master of ceremonies for the four-day Festival, took one look at the capacity crowd (upwards of 10,000) and his opening remark was "Let's Where would anyone have believed it?"

"Mahalia" Willis, and we use the term affectionately, was, for the benefit of those who came late into the jazz scene, the Honorary Mayor of Bourbon Street, one of the most lovable and renowned brothers of old New Orleans. Her contributions to jazz, dispatched from time to time some of the pioneer jazz piano men. And at the age he remembered one of the first jazz patrons. If not merely an entertainer.

However, Mme. Willis might have balanced some of the music which followed Conover's announcement, because the first group heard at that opening concert was that of George Lewis and his New Orleans traditionalists, undoubtedly representing the finest surviving example of the original jazz ensemble style. This band was diverse home-grown (exclusively in an audience consisting largely of young people, few of whom had expected to hear anything quite so perfect and soul-satisfying from a band of old, creatively retrieved and unknown musicians.

Lewis, together with Joe Robichaux, piano; Jack Willis, trumpet; Bob Thomas, trombone; Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau, bass; and Joe Watkins, drums, warmed up on "Bourbon Street Parade" and then launched into a succession of some better known New Orleans standards. The tunes — "I'm Read Blues," "Round Garden Blues" and "That's A Plenty" afforded an excellent opportunity for the crowd to compare Lewis' brand with the more common, eastern sounds of Dixieland. It was a tip of fun, sure vintage wine.

Here was no attempt to dazzle, there was little virtuosity displayed, but every note played by each improvised line in the ensemble and a off left into place. There were not the usual excursions of solos, but rather more of the front line interchanging the lead. Lewis kept the time with a sort of easy trudging of his tenor, and the whole thing evolved and swung right off the ground with a minimum of effort. Perhaps the most delighted listeners in the place were some of the continental aficionados. The enthusiasm took particularly happy with Jack Willis, a complete unknown, who displayed a beautiful jaw-dropper tone, graceful phrasing and just the right amount of drive.

TURK MURPHY, outstanding representative of the New Orleans (via San Francisco) revivalists, opened the fifth concert, which was held Saturday night, July 6. His line-up consisted of Bob Scobey, cornet; Larry Conger, trumpet; Fred Vandon, drums; Pete Clute, piano; Al Conger, tuba; Dick Lemm, banjo; and Murphy, trombone. Murphy has continued, at his own entertaining way, the great work investigating begun in the late '20's by his erstwhile employers, Lu Watters, director of the Yerba Buena Jazz Band. Some of his numerical actually predate jazz, the rags, minstrel tunes and such, but to them he has found the same exuberance, humor and contagious fun possessed the original jazz. He leans heavily also on the arranged concepts of the late Jelly Roll Morton, consistent relegating improvisation to a lesser role. There's a great cross-section of his repertoire provided in this Newport sampling of "St. James Infirmary," "Weary Blues" and "Down By The Riverside."

GEORGE LEWIS was born in New Orleans nine days after Louis Armstrong. That would make the date July 13, 1900. Turkey day he learned to read music, and if the dole music probably would come to be the smartest, contented, happy thing he quite obviously needs in. He started playing professionally while in his teens, and never stopped although, strictly, actually outside of New Orleans not heard of him until 1943 when he was placed in the band of the newly re-discovered Bunk Johnson. He had played with Bud Atkins in the '20's, and with Bunk originally from 1929-31. Until several years ago, when his health went bad, he continued to accept "gigs" with New Orleans-operating bands and such.

In the spring of '57, he toured England as featured soloist with several British Dixie groups and was considerable affection from musicians and fans alike.

There are no youngsters in Lewis' band. The only other "name" is "Slow Drag" Pavageau, who is 59 and, like Lewis, a veteran of Bunk Johnson's band in the '30's. He has been playing bass early since the age of 12, and prior to that was a guitarist and vocalist in the late old Creole traditions.

Bunk, then, is "traditional" jazz, as presented at Newport in 1957. Your presentator is Willis Conover.

Notes by Bill Simon

PROGRAM

Side One:

BOURBON STREET PARADE

TIN ROOF BLUES

ROYAL GARDEN BLUES
George Lewis Band: Lewis, clarinet; Joe Robichaux, piano; Jack Willis, trumpet; Bob Thomas, trombone; Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau, bass; Joe Watkins, drums

Side Two:

THAT'S A PLENTY
George Lewis Band

ST. JAMES INFIRMARY

WEARY BLUES

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE
Turk Murphy Band: Murphy, trombone; Bob Scobey, cornet; Larry Conger, trumpet; Fred Vandon, drums; Pete Clute, piano; Al Conger, tuba; Dick Lemm, banjo

Verve
RECORDS
Immortal Jazz On Verve IX vol. 13-D
GEORGE LEWIS AT NEWPORT
MONO
UMV 2621
M
33
1
1. BASIN STREET BLUES (Williams) 1:28
2. BOURBON STREET PARADE (Barbarin) 5:13
3. TIN ROOF BLUES (Rappolo-Mares-
Brunies-Pollock-Stitzel-Melrose) 6:37
4. ROYAL GARDEN BLUES (Williams-Williams) 4:06
ALL SONGS ASCAP
EXCEPT IS BMI