



**Centennial**

**King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (Archeophone)**  
by Scott Yanow

In 1923, King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band recorded 37 performances. While the first jazz recordings had been made six years earlier by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and in the interim such significant groups as the Louisiana Five, the Original Memphis Five and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (ironically influenced by Oliver although they made their first recordings a year earlier than his) had been documented, Oliver's group was on a different level.

The Creole Jazz Band was usually comprised of Oliver (1881-1938) and his greatest admirer Louis Armstrong (cornets), plus Honore Dutrey (trombone), Johnny Dodds (arguably the top 1920s clarinetist), Lil Hardin (piano and Armstrong's future wife), Bud Scott or Bill Johnson (banjo) and "Baby" Dodds (drums), all of whom made their recording debut with the band. Their music emphasized stirring ensembles with occasional brief solos and exciting two-bar breaks. The latter often found Oliver (whose 87-year death anniversary is this month) and Armstrong (with just a few seconds' notice) spontaneously creating perfectly harmonized phrases to the amazement of the audience. The band was a

sensation in Chicago during 1922-23 and was the most important jazz group on recordings up to that time.

Due to the primitive acoustic recording quality of the era, it has often been difficult for listeners from later generations to fully appreciate the Creole Jazz Band's innovations. However, recording techniques have greatly improved with each reissue through the years and Archeophone's new *Centennial* release has the clearest sound yet, with Richard Martin deserving applause for the restoration and remastering. One can fully hear not only the horns but the rhythm section with Hardin's usually under-recorded piano regaining its rightful place in the ensemble. Quite the impressive and imaginative compilation, this 4-CD (plus 2-LP) set begins with the 37 Creole Jazz Band recordings, reissued not in the order of their recording dates but instead in the order in which they were originally released. Among the highlights are such numbers as two versions apiece of "Dippermouth Blues" and "Snake Rag", "Canal Street Blues", "Froggie Moore", "Chimes Blues" (featuring Armstrong's first recorded solo), "Zulu's Ball" (from the only copy ever found), "Chattanooga Stomp" and "Buddy's Habit".

The interplay between the horns is a consistent joy and it is recommended to play these recordings at a fairly loud volume so one can hear everything that is going on, including Johnny Dodds' counter-melodies and Armstrong's harmonies as a second cornetist behind Oliver's lead. The 37 selections are reissued in the set twice (most of the first two CDs). The second CD also contains three "bonus" selections that were originally issued as the B sides of the Oliver 78s. These are fine performances by Art Landry's Syncopatin' Six, Clarence Williams and Young's Creole Jazz Band.

In addition to the improved recording quality, *Centennial* has other special features including the contents of the other two CDs. Disc 3 is titled *Louis' Record Collection*. Nearly all of its 26 selections were either in Armstrong's library or were performances that he praised in print. Dating from 1891-1921, included is quite a wide span of early recordings that made an early impression on Armstrong. The music includes the operatic singing of Enrico Caruso, a Sousa march, early period vocals, a bit of ragtime ("Maple Leaf Rag" played by the U.S. Marine Band), Al Jolson, military bands, a medley of bugle calls, some comedy, the virtuosic cornet playing of Herbert L. Clarke ("Carnival of Venice"), Bert Williams, a number apiece by W.C. Handy and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and early versions of such future standards as "Oh Didn't He Ramble", "High Society" and "Ballin' The Jack". A unique addition is a cylinder that Armstrong did not own and probably never heard but is included for its historic value. The earliest existing recording made in New Orleans, singer Louis Vassier's comedy song "Thompson's Old Grey Mule" is from 1891, four years before Buddy Bolden formed his first band. This is the first time (after over 130 years) that it has been reissued.

The fourth disc, which is called *Joe's Jazz Kingdom*, has 26 selections from 1920-23 that give one a strong sampling of what else was going on in the jazz world during that early period, at least on records. Among the many bands represented are Art Hickman's Orchestra, Paul Whiteman ("Wang Wang Blues"), an instrumental version of "Royal Garden Blues" by Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds, Isham Jones, Johnny Dunn, the Original Memphis Five, The Georgians, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings and Jelly Roll Morton. This collection represents the mainstream jazz of the time, right before King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band moved the music much further ahead. As if this was not enough, *Centennial* also includes a poster of the Creole Jazz Band and an 80-page book largely written by Louis Armstrong biographer Ricky Riccardi who explores the relationship between Oliver and Armstrong and supplies detailed notes on each of the 92 selections that are in this reissue. As usual Riccardi's writing is lively and very informative.

*Centennial* is quite a magnificent reissue and does full justice to the music and legacy of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band.

For more info visit [archeophone.com](http://archeophone.com). "Centennial Sounds" (with Centennial boxed set producers Richard Martin and Meagan Hennessey) is at Louis Armstrong Center Apr. 26. See Calendar.



**Odyssey**  
**Nubya Garcia (Concord)**  
by Andrew Schinder

Tenor saxophonist and composer Nubya Garcia's ascension to the throne as queen of the modern London jazz scene is complete, having spent the past few years recording and touring with such modern British jazz luminaries as Shabaka Hutchings, Joe Armon-Jones, Tom Skinner and Theon Cross. Last September, she released what is her sophomore album, *Odyssey*, a great leap forward from her excellent debut *Source* (2020). While *Source* had its origins in London's club scene, the new *Odyssey* has its roots in a chamber music milieu. The album is a lavish affair and in it, Garcia weaves together orchestral and post-bop arrangements, melding them together with modern Latin, R&B and dub rhythms. As the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, she proudly displays her ancestral origins but also layers them in a dreamy symphonic landscape of classical overtones—so there's a lot going on here.

Album opener is the aptly-titled "Dawn", featuring virtuoso esperanza spalding providing vocals. Britain's Chineke! Orchestra, whose mission is to feature historically underrepresented Black and ethnically diverse classical musicians from the U.K. and Europe, provides the string arrangements on the album; on the opening track the Orchestra promptly sets the mood by accompanying spalding's dreamy, soulful crooning. Garcia's old friend Armon-Jones contributes keyboards, and lets his presence be known immediately, providing a powerful segue before the leader finally kicks in with her saxophone prowess. On "Set it Free", British percussion mainstay Sam Barrell Jones delivers a hip-hop inspired backing beat to Garcia's hooky, groovy melodies. Singer Richie Seivwright, who rose to prominence with the U.K. jazz-Afrobeat collective Kokoroko, delivers lush, crescendo-laden R&B vocals. The hooks and grooves continue on "The Seer", a straight-up banger. The mixture of Jones' percussion, Armon-Jones' piano licks and Garcia's jamming contributions positively explode, bringing the album's midpoint to a fist-pumping climax.

Soul jazz icon Georgia Anne Muldrow takes the vocal reins on "We Walk in Gold", accompanying Jones' hand drums and Armon-Jones' light, delicate piano playing before the track builds up to a dazzling crescendo highlighting the dual power of her stunning voice and Garcia's muscular saxophone playing. The album concludes with the laid-back dub beat and Garcia-provided reggae-inspired, spoken-word vocals of "Triumphance", before ending with a choral upsurge that culminates the music with a powerful surge.

*Odyssey's* complexity is one that rewards contemplation and concentration.

For more info visit [concord.com](http://concord.com). Garcia is at Music Hall of Williamsburg Apr. 5. See Calendar.

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