



CELESTINE SIBLEY

Kiwanis 'hepcats' sponsor a cool jazz discussion

One of the things I like about the Kiwanis Club is that there are opening and closing songs, a blessing before the meal and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. All of these things have been dropped from many public meetings, and for those of us who were raised on them — at public school usually — it's a sad loss. I have always marveled that Kiwanians sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" with such verve and authority — so much better, I feel, than the soloists they often have at conventions and baseball games who tamper with the tune.

But now the downtown Kiwanians have surpassed themselves. Professor Dwight Andrews, who teaches jazz at Emory University and who is slated to do the same thing at Harvard University next year, had members of the club enthusiastically singing a Louis Armstrong hit, "Big Butter and Egg Man," the other day.

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He began by drawing a big laugh when he said he understood they were "hepcats" — and he progressed from there, playing a wonderful Louis Armstrong trumpet solo, coming down from the speaker's platform to cruise among the tables, clapping his hands, snapping his fingers, shaking his shoulders and congratulating the "hepcats" on their singing. Ironically, many of the singers had that day collected pins for 30, 40 or 50 years of membership, which suggests that they had picked up some age along the way.

Professor Andrews made the meeting the most fun we have had in a while, but he also discussed jazz in scholarly terms as having given the world "one of its most important musical impressions." He spoke of the unfortunate times in American history, slavery and segregation, which produced rich spirituals and blues, and he pointed out spots where Beethoven and Mozart were comparable.

Unfortunately, the "Big Butter and Egg Man" isn't as colorful as some Louis Armstrong specials, lyric-wise, but it was fun to try, especially when the professor led the way. I liked the lines:

*When you're listening to Satch,
You know you're listening right...*

Since my children supply me with jazz discs and I listen a lot in the car, I've become attached to some very colorful Satch. "My Bucket's Got a Hole in It" strikes me as having a pretty profound moral lesson.

Professor Andrews gave us copies of some Charlie Parker words, which we didn't get around to singing but are fun to read.

Come with me

If you wanna go to Kansas City.

I'm feelin' low down and blue

My heart's full of sorrow,

Don't hardly know what to do.

Where will I be tomorrow?

It ends with his words about dying:

Parker's been your friend

Don't hang your head when you see

When you see those six pretty horses pullin' me.

Put a twenty-dollar silver piece on my

Watch chain, look at the smile on my face

And sing a little song to let the world know I'm really free.

Don't cry for me cause I'm going to Kansas City.

It's not your typical Kiwanis fare. We spend a lot of time talking and thinking about civic betterment, the problems of young people, education, charity and the military. It's a varied diet of speeches in a year's time but nothing as lively and as much fun as singing with Louis Armstrong and his valiant representative, Professor Andrews. Those students in Harvard have a treat coming.

Celestine Sibley's column appears Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in Living and Sundays in Dixie Living.