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Reginald A. McDonald  
*Tennessee State University*

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**Instrumental Music Ensemble at Tennessee State University: THE EARLY  
YEARS (1912 – 1946)**

Reginald A. McDonald

Accepted wisdom suggests that a band program has been an integral part of Tennessee State University (TSU)<sup>1</sup> academic activities for many years. But the story of exactly how that program developed is largely incomplete. Perhaps one reason for such circumstances is that students, educators, administrators, musicians, admirers, and directors often left little documented evidence of various musical activities. Moreover, even in the memories of those closest to the TSU instrumental program, names, dates, and places are at times inconsistent and inaccurate. In short, evidence, written or anecdotal, that accurately depicts the genesis and development of the TSU Band program between 1912 and the present remains in limited supply.

Perhaps due to these circumstances numerous misconceptions about the origin of the program currently exist. For example, one such erroneous contention encountered was that Professor Jordan D. “Chick” Chavis was the first Band Director and that the TSU instrumental music program began during his tenure. Some evidence suggests that Chavis, in his own words, contributed to this incorrect assumption. He wrote, for instance,

President [Walter] S. Davis had the vision and foresight that led to the creation of this organization. It was his brainchild and conception. He could foresee as a result of such a program the emergence of trained personnel who would become Instrumental Directors of both band and orchestra, music teachers, and instructors, also performing artists, both classical and popular organizations. To provide this educational opportunity, Dr. W. S. Davis made available twenty (20) four-year scholarships and sent the writer on a recruitment trip to select deserving high school students who could

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout its history, TSU has been known by the following names: Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes (1912 – 1924), Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal College (1924 – 1927), Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Teachers College (1927 – 1935), Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College (1935 – 1951), Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University (1951 – 1969), and Tennessee state University (1969 – present).

qualify for this program. At the end of the summer (September 1946), there appeared on the campus of Tennessee State University a motley assemblage of young music recruits from varying backgrounds; big metropolitan high schools and small rural training schools, all excited about one central thing, music. It was my duty and responsibility as architect and leader to mold this raw material with diversified background into a finished, polished functional product.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous other sources suggests that Chavis reorganized a program that had been in existence for many years prior to his tenure. Those documents also indicated- at least by implication-that attribution of the development of the instrumental program to Chavis was the result of a three-year period of inactivity that directly preceded his appointment.

McCarrell argued that intervals such as this were a result of the advent of World War II. He wrote,

This country's entry into World War II, in December 1941, marked the beginning of a period of dramatic changes in the college band movement. Perhaps the most disruptive occurrences in the history of the college band movement, up until that time, took place between 1941 and 1946. University enrollments were depleted throughout the nation, and the activities of colleges were often modified.<sup>3</sup>

The *Bulletin* (1941 – 1942) Academic Year Enrollment Chart listed a total of 1512 students, which included 537 men and 975 women. By the 1943-44 academic year (the height of WWII), the *Bulletin* (1944 -1945) showed a reduction of male students to 189 and a slight increase of female students to 1067. Enrollment Charts for the 1945-46 academic year recorded a modest increase of male students to 557 and female students to 1419.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. Chavis, "History of the Band and Instrumental Music Program in the Black Public Schools of Nashville and Davidson County; (A Chronological Treatise on Beginning and Development of Organized Band and Instrumental Music in the Black Public Schools)." (Unpublished manuscript, 1984), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> L. McCarrell. "A Historical Review of the College Band Movement from 1875 to 1969" (dissertation, Florida State University, 1971), 118.

<sup>4</sup> A new academic service, the Veterans Program, was also offered to returning GI's. It offered classes and counseling services that included Agricultural and Industrial Training; Financial, Personnel, and Adjustment

Another possible explanation for Chavis' reputation as the founding director of the program was the simple fact that he was the first faculty member whose full-time duty was exclusively as Director of Bands. Prior to 1946, leadership of the program was the responsibility of several faculty members who served dual roles, directing the Band in addition to some other teaching duties. For instance, one such Professor, Jesse D. Hayes, was hired in 1937 as Physical Science Professor and Bandmaster.<sup>5</sup>

In sum these two occurrences--the gap in the program and Chavis' status as the first full-time Instrumental Director--likely led directly to the spurious contention that September 1946 was the date of the first TSU instrumental program. However, evidence strongly suggests that an instrumental music program existed as early as 1912. Put succinctly, the TSU instrumental program, at times student directed, was an active part of TSU student life and an integrated facet of the vibrant cultural fabric of Nashville, Tennessee, many years before Chavis' celebrated directorship.

In a 1913 article, the *Nashville Globe* introduced Professor N. W. Ryder, TSU's first Music Director.<sup>6</sup> The article read in part, "The addition of Prof. N. W. Ryder in the music department means that the feature of the work will take great boom, as Prof. Ryder is very popular in Nashville and is well known throughout the country."<sup>7</sup> According to the *Bulletin* of 1913, "Mr. N. W. Ryder, of Fisk and Oberlin Universities, and who had charge of the Music Department of Lawrenceville, Virginia, will take charge of the same department here."<sup>8</sup>

R. Grann Lloyd's research documenting TSU campus activities 1912 – 1962 suggests that organized musical activities became a central part of campus life very early in TSU's existence.<sup>9</sup> Lloyd revealed, for example, that early in 1913, members of the State Legislature first visited the campus. Lloyd specifically referenced a

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Problems consultation; and Educational and Psychological Testing. *Bulletin Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes*. 53 vols. 1913– 1955.

<sup>5</sup> The 1937 *Bulletin* read as follows: "Prof. Hayes received the bachelor of education degree at Illinois State Teachers College and the Master of Science degree at the University of Illinois" (1). Professor Hayes served Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in this capacity from 1937 – 1943.

<sup>6</sup> In 2011, the title Music Director and Music Department Chairman are synonymous.

<sup>7</sup> Ryder was a graduate of Fisk University and was, at one time, a member of the faculty (*Nashville Globe*, 1913).

<sup>8</sup> *Bulletin*, 1918, 15.

<sup>9</sup> R. G. Lloyd, *Tennessee Agricultural State University, 1912 – 1962*. Tennessee State University, Library.

special assembly for the legislators. At that assembly, both the student Choral Society and the Band performed.

The *Nashville Globe* reported various other significant musical activities in subsequent years. For example, a February 16, 1917 article reported on the student play, *The Girl from L-Ranch*. It revealed, “Special incidental music is to be furnished by a seven piece orchestra as well as music between acts.”<sup>10</sup> Also in 1917, the *Nashville Globe* reported on a Flag Presentation Ceremony in which School’s Band performed as an integral part of the event. It read,

Among the other speakers of the day were Dr. Geo W. Hubbard, President of Meharry Medical College; Dr. E. A. White, President of Walden University; Miss Katie A. Boyd, representing Pearl High School; Mr. A. N. Johnson, President of the Negro Board of Trade; Mr. C. N. Langston, Assistant Cashier of the One Cent Savings Bank; Rev. H. A. Boyd, representing the National Negro Press. The program was in charge of the senior class. Patriotic music was dispensed by the State Normal Band. President W. J. Hale also made a beautiful response when the flag was presented to him by a member of the class. Miss Jennie Durley made the presentation speech. After the exercise, and while Old Glory was going up the mast pole, the band played *The Stars and Stripes Forever*.

In a 1918 *Nashville Globe* article titled, “Mrs. W. J. Hale Hostess,” Mrs. Hale, wife of TSU’s first president, alluded to the Music Director of the fledging TSU music department. She described details of a program in which the school Orchestra performed under the direction of Mrs. Martha Brown. Said Mrs. Hale, “When all had arrived, they were invited into the chapel where the school Orchestra, directed by Mrs. Brown and assisted by several talented ladies from the city, rendered one of the most pleasing musicales [sic] ever enjoyed at an afternoon reception.” Further confirmation of Mrs. Martha Brown’s music faculty status

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<sup>10</sup> *Nashville Globe*, February 16, 1917, 5.

McDonald: Instrumental Music Ensemble at Tennessee State University: THE Early Years (1912-1946) appeared in the 1918 *Bulletin*, which listed her as Music and Domestic Science Faculty.<sup>11</sup>

Notably, that same 1918 *Nashville Globe* article disclosed that Professor J. T. Gray performed a saxophone solo. According to *Bulletins* published subsequent to 1918, Professor J. T. Gray later became the Director of the Band.

As further evidence of the growing significance of music in TSU campus life, the 1919 *Bulletin* included the requirement that all students take vocal music each year of their school career. It also suggested the importance of the more select Band program. It read, in part, “The School Orchestra and Band furnish an unusual opportunity for instrumental music.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, that same volume listed the following “Principal Events” of the 1918 – 1919 academic year: (a) November 1, 1918, Miss Helen Hagan begins work as Music Director [Music Department Chair], with Glee Club Chorus, Orchestra, and Band Departments, and (b) March 21, 1919, First Band Concert by School Band, under the direction of J. T. Gray.

By 1922, the *Bulletin* offered more comprehensive course descriptions for instrumental music. It argued, for example, that the Orchestra and Band, like the Chorus, added a distinctive feature to the many activities of the institution. It further revealed that the Band not only played for various chapel exercises but from time to time presented concerts both at the school and in nearby towns. It also stated that the Band was to be supplied with new instruments and uniforms to serve as an incentive for students to join the organization and to allow the Band to present a more polished final product.<sup>13</sup>

TSU appeared to recognize the need to provide music teachers for the rapidly burgeoning public school music programs in Tennessee. For example, 1922 curriculum information included the following revealing statement:

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<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Brown was later listed by the *Bulletin* (1923 – 1924) as Music and Library faculty. She also played a significant role in establishing and maintaining the institution’s first library. Today TSU’s main campus library, The Brown-Daniel Library, is named partially in recognition of Martha Brown.

<sup>12</sup> *Bulletin*, 1919, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Fancher (1975) showed that the first catalog listed six student organizations that were operational on the campus and after ten years the number had grown to 30. They were Literary Societies, 4; Selective Clubs (Social), 10; Sectional Clubs (Geographic), 3; Special or Trade Clubs, 2; honorary Societies, 2; Religious Organizations, 5; Music Organizations (Band and Choral), 4.

In view of the emphasis now being placed upon Public School Music, the school feels that [a course] of this type of training is essential to the student's all-rounded development and in his ability to fill his place as leader in his community. This Public School Music [course], together with the chorus, Orchestra, and Band, gives students an unusual opportunity to fill his place wherever he may be called to serve.<sup>14</sup>

The *Nashville Globe*, some years later, provided written evidence that the early TSU music curriculum and the Nashville public school music programs likely contributed positively to musical growth of Nashville's African-American citizens. In an article titled, "Who's Who in Columbia," the *Nashville Globe* reported,

This week we are presenting to the readers of the *Nashville Globe* Prof. S. C. Bond [Sam Carter Bond], who is favorably known to his personal friends as "Si Cotty." . . . Prof. Bond is one of Columbia's [Tennessee] best pianists. He is pianist and Director of the well-known "Swing Bonners" Orchestra. This music has made Columbians swing out many pairs of shoes. Prof. Bond received his education in the elementary schools of Maury County [Tennessee] and Tennessee A. and I. State College, Nashville. Prof. Bond plays the saxophone equally well as the piano. He played both instruments in the Tennessee State Orchestra while attending the institution.<sup>15</sup>

By 1923 the TSU music faculty had grown to three full or part time teachers. The August 1923 *Bulletin* listed the following professors: Ruth Bandy – Violin (New England Conservatory of Music), Harold Brown – Music and Band (A. B. & Mus. B, Fisk University), and Martha Brown – Library and Music (American Conservatory). Notably, that issue was the first to include band as a specific job description for one of its professors.

Page 53 of that *Bulletin*, which includes a description of courses offered in music suggested significant growth both in curricular and extra-curricular offerings.<sup>16</sup> It included the following:

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<sup>14</sup> *Bulletin*, 1922, 30.

<sup>15</sup> "Who's Who in Columbia," *Nashville Globe*, 1940.

<sup>16</sup> *Bulletin*, 1923, 53.

The Band, Orchestra, Choir and Quartettes from various groups furnish a variety of interesting music for the entertainment and instruction of students. Aside from the enjoyment afforded the listeners, the participants themselves are strengthened in the matter of organizing and maintaining their groups. A plan is now on foot to organize a Harmony Society in Music, similar to that in Chemistry. Brown served the university from 1923 -1926 as Instructor of Music and Director of Bands. The instrumentation included one trombone, one tuba (baritone), three trumpets, one violin, and one drummer.<sup>17</sup>

Notably, documents and photographic artifacts suggest that the Band, which numbered seven, included a self-described student leader, William F. Woodard. Woodard's specific responsibilities remain unclear, as do the circumstances surrounding Brown's resignation. However, that Brown left TSU sometime immediately after the 1925 -1926 term is clear from the lack of his inclusion as faculty member in the August 1926 *Bulletin*.

Professor Clarence Hayden Wilson, a TSU alumnus (graduating class of 1920), was listed in the August 1926 *Bulletin* as Brown's replacement.<sup>18</sup> Professor Wilson co-wrote TSU's second *Alma Mater*, which is still in use. During his four-year tenure, he built on the efforts of his predecessors by further developing the school instrumental program.<sup>19</sup> His instrumental ensembles regularly played for chapel exercises and gave school concerts on campus as well as in nearby towns. In October of 1927, Wilson described the TSU instrumental music program in the following words: "The school Band and Orchestra play an incalculable part in music

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<sup>17</sup> Photograph of the 1924 TSU Band can be found on page 17 of dissertation, "THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors" by Reginald A. McDonald.

<sup>18</sup> Such data is apparently in disagreement with other, more recent published information stating that Professor Edward L. Graves, Director of Bands 1979 to present, is the first alumnus to direct the University's Bands. Clarence Wilson's biography states that he is a 1920 alumnus of TSU and also earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwestern University.

<sup>19</sup> Photograph of Professor Clarence H. Wilson with the TSU Orchestra/Band can be found on page 19 of dissertation, "THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors" by Reginald A. McDonald.

appreciation as they give the individual a chance to perform and the relations of various instruments and their tone quality is brought to him more forcefully.”<sup>20</sup>

Noteworthy events during Wilson’s tenure included a 1929 lanternslides presentation at an annual visit of prominent State Officials. It consisted of photographs of former governors and school scenes and also included an Orchestra concert, which served as prelude to the slide presentation (*Bulletin*, 1929).

By 1930, Wilson’s Orchestra and Chorus had become proficient enough to present combined performances. Watkins wrote, “The Orchestra, Chorus, and student body of A. and I. State College went on the air Friday, February 28, at Chapel hour over radio station WLAC . . . Professor C. H. Wilson directed the Orchestra and Chorus.”<sup>21</sup> Of particular interest, Jordan D. “Chick” Chavis, who later occupied Wilson’s directorship, played trumpet in several of Wilson’s bands.<sup>22</sup>

The specific reasons for Wilson’s departure from TSU in 1930 to teach public high school band in St. Louis, Missouri, remain unknown. Evidence suggests, however, that he continued to build a distinguished career as a music educator. According to the Missouri Historical Society, Wilson’s teaching included several important appointments in the St. Louis Public School System. He also served in a national music education leadership role as President of the National Association of Negro Musicians from 1941 – 1948.<sup>23</sup>

Though TSU instrumental music activity did not cease entirely throughout the early and mid-thirties, few documents exist between the tenures of Clarence Wilson (1926 – 1930) and Jesse Hayes (1937 – 1943) to suggest otherwise. Still, while the Great Depression significantly curtailed students activities at TSU and other colleges and universities nationwide, TSU instrumental music activity likely continued

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<sup>20</sup> *Bulletin*, 1927, 23.

<sup>21</sup> C. E. Watkins, *Jordan Douglass “Chick” Chavis, Jr., 1910 - : A Transcription of Oral Historical-biographical interviews*, Tennessee State University, 1979, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Broom & Tucker (1990) wrote, that on graduation in 1928, [Jordan D. “Chick”] Chavis attended Walden [College] for one year, moved to TSU for one year, and then transferred to Fisk University. While he was at TSU, Chavis played in a dance band directed by a Professor [Clarence H.] Wilson. The group called itself The Tennessee State Collegians, a name Chavis used again years later.

<sup>23</sup> Jason D. Stratman, Assistant Librarian, Missouri Historical Society Library. Personal interview. 26 Feb. 2007.

McDonald: Instrumental Music Ensemble at Tennessee State University: THE Early Years (1912-1946) through the efforts of volunteer faculty or, more significantly, through numerous *ad hoc* Student Directors.

In support of such assumptions, McCarrell argued early college bands existed sporadically and were often associated with some military activity or operated as a student social organization. He further posited that these music organizations were rarely documented because student organizations were rarely documented because student organizers simply failed to keep records.<sup>24</sup> This scenario seems to be the case with the TSU Band program, especially from 1930 – 1937. To be succinct, though there are some indications that instrumental ensemble activity occurred during those years, no written evidence of faculty leadership during that period exists.

Instrumental music ensemble activity at TSU during this seven-year period appeared almost exclusively to be a single student organized dance orchestra (jazz band) called the Tennessee State Collegians.<sup>25</sup> The use of “dance orchestra” in this specific case was the earliest documented use of the term orchestra in reference to Jazz Bands at TSU. While it is unknown whether or not these students were enrolled in the ensemble for credit, documents show that an orchestra course description remained in the curriculum guide from 1930 – 1937.<sup>26</sup>

TSU Associate Professor and Head Reference Librarian Fletcher Moon (1983 – present) offered the following insight about the early years of the performing group:

I [Fletcher Moon, TSU Head Reference Librarian] was told by Charles Dungey [TSU Jazz Ensemble Director 1997 – 2003] that the documentation [Dr. Andrew Goodrich] has indicates that Don Q. Pullen was the first Director of the Jazz Collegians, according to Frank T. Greer [TSU Director of Bands 1951 – 1972], who was a member of the group with Blanton. However, he is talking about the middle to late 1930s when he and Blanton were students; Edward Hale could still have proceeded [*sic*] or followed

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<sup>24</sup> L. McCarrell. “A Historical Review of the College Band Movement from 1875 to 1969” (dissertation, Florida State University, 1971), 118.

<sup>25</sup> The Collegians become the foundation for the nationally acclaimed Jazz Ensemble that would be reorganized under Professor Chavis’ leadership. Many of these student musicians went on to professional careers in the recording and performing industry and in music education. One such musician is the famous bassist Jimmy Blanton (1918 – 1942), who went on to become a member of Duke Ellington’s Orchestra.

<sup>26</sup> *Bulletin*, 1937.

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Pullen, as well as Bill Mears, whose name appears in a 1935 Pittsburgh Courier article. The Director of the Tennessee State (Jazz) Collegians during Blanton's time may have been Edward Hale, one of the sons of Tennessee State's first president, William Jasper Hale. We have yearbooks from 1931 and 1939, but none for the years in between. Hale is listed in the 1939 yearbook as Director, but the Collegians are not mentioned in the 1931 yearbook.<sup>27</sup>

Other notable musicians who performed with the Collegians were Frank T. Greer, TSU Director of Bands, (1951 – 1972)<sup>28</sup>; Rushton Miller, member of the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame; Paul Quinichette (professional jazz musician nicknamed “Vice President” because his tenor saxophone tone was similar to the legendary Lester Young) who performed with Count Basie, Billie Holiday, and Benny Goodman; Earl (Sonny) Turner, professional jazz trumpeter; and Dr. Andrew Goodrich (professional jazz musician and research historian of the Black College Jazz Movement) (Goodrich, 2001).

Numerous Sources suggest that by 1937, the student-led Tennessee State Collegians was flourishing.<sup>29</sup> Among their many documented performances were engagements at the A. & I. State College History Study Club Elaborate Dance,<sup>30</sup> and a performance at Norris Beach led by student Bandleader, Don Q. Pullen.<sup>31</sup>

In March 1937, the *Bulletin* detailed a visit of Tennessee's Governor to the campus. Governor Gordon Browning, state constitutional officials, members of the Governor's Cabinet, and members of the General Assembly were luncheon guests at

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<sup>27</sup> K. Steiner, Email correspondence with Fletcher F. Moon, Assistant Professor/Head Reference Librarian, Tennessee State University, July 10- 11, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Though Greer earned a bachelor's degree from West Virginia State University and master's degree at Marshall University, he was a student at TSU (1936 – 1938) before leaving to pursue a career as a professional jazz musician.

<sup>29</sup> Photograph of the 1937 – 1938 members of the TSU Collegians can be found on page 21 of dissertation, “THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors” by Reginald A. McDonald.

<sup>30</sup> *Bulletin*, 1937.

<sup>31</sup> Photograph of the 1935 newspaper article discussing the TSU Collegians performance at Norris Beach from the *Pittsburgh Courier* can be found on page 22 of dissertation, “THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors” by Reginald A. McDonald.

TSU on Wednesday, February 17, 1937. The Governor's party was entertained with a musical program by the College Orchestra and the Concert Singers.

That program was likely at least overseen, if not conducted, by Marie Brooks-Strange, TSU's Music Department Chair (1930 – 1948). Personal communications with various alumni revealed that Professor Marie Brooks-Strange was a “Jack of All Trades” in the Music Department from 1930 through the early 1940s.<sup>32</sup> A local newspaper described the event:

And then . . . the Grand Finale! That luscious part in every program where in the best is presented. A real honest to goodness highbrow presentation! The Music Department with a combination of Concert Singers, Orchestra, and Chorus under the efficient direction of Mrs. Marie Brooks-Strange Director, presented the musical production “From the Old South.”<sup>33</sup>

As across the United States in general, early documents that referenced the TSU instrumental program tended to use the terms *orchestra* and *band* interchangeably. But during the 1930s clearer distinctions between the two ensembles began to emerge. For example, TSU student Don Q. Pullen's 1939 yearbook photograph lists the Orchestra and Band as separate school organizations in which he held memberships (Ayeni [pronounced A and I – nickname for Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College/University], 1939). This evolving division of performing forces was also clear in a *Bulletin* (1937) article that introduced TSU's newly hired Instrumental Music Director. It read,

It is expected that from three to four thousand will be here for this ceremony. Exhibits featuring the phenomenal growth of the college will be in evidence everywhere and brilliant musical recitals presenting members of the famed musical department . . . . The pure social aspect of the celebration is unique

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<sup>32</sup> The Strange Music Building at TSU is named in honor of Marie Brooks-Strange.

<sup>33</sup> Photograph of Marie Brooks-Strange, TSU Music Department Chair (1930 – 1948) can be found on page 23 of dissertation, “THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors” by Reginald A. McDonald. *Nashville Globe*, 1937, 1.

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and will be enlivened by the noted orchestra and band under the direction of Prof. Jesse D. Hayes (p.2).<sup>34</sup>

Hayes began his tenure at TSU in the fall of 1937 and quickly set about expanding and improving the instrumental program. That first fall, for instance, he was featured at TSU's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration where, according to the *Bulletin* (1937), "Special music was furnished by the Tennessee State collegians under the direction of Professor Jesse D. Hayes."<sup>35</sup> In reference to another concert that same year, the *Nashville Globe* (1938) wrote,

The Band concert Friday night, under the direction of Professor Hayes, attracted a capacity throng of music lovers from every avenue of life. With rhythmic swing and harmony, the group played classic and popular numbers, captivating the throng by special improvisations. The Band has attained unusual prominence of late under the masterly direction of Professor Hayes and adds to the brilliant musical reputation of the institution.

Hayes' efforts very soon led to recognition of a glaring need of his burgeoning program: new band uniforms. Fundraising was the key in the acquisition of the necessary financial resources for such a large expense. In that regard, the following plea was included in the *Bulletin* (1938):

The continual cry of the Band, "We Want Uniforms!" came to a climax on Friday, Nov. 4, as the A. & I. State Collegians presented a Varsity Show entitled, "The Collegians" [the title of this show seems to be a musical production about the Jazz Orchestra] which was sponsored by the College Band. For two or three weeks the Band had been pleading with students, faculty members and friends to give subscriptions and buy tickets for the Varsity Show so they might secure uniforms.

. . . President Hale has promised the Band \$ 5.00 for every \$ 1.00 they raised and according to the auditorium on Friday night, President Hale will miss a

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<sup>34</sup> Photograph of Jesse Hayes, TSU Bandmaster and Physical Science Professor (1937 – 1943) can be found on page 27 of dissertation, "THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors" by Reginald A. McDonald.

<sup>35</sup> *Bulletin*, 1937, 2.

few bills. Congratulations to the Band on your achievement and on to Lincoln University in your uniforms with your colors flying high!<sup>36</sup>

The 1939 course catalog was the first to include a course description for both the Orchestra and the Band.<sup>37</sup> The *Bulletin* (1939) read, “Musical Organizations . . . College Orchestra and Band . . . Prerequisite: Must be able to play instrument. Rehearsals twice weekly throughout the year.”<sup>38</sup> The next year, the *Bulletin* (1940) for the first time listed the specific day and time offerings of the Orchestra and Band.

Such expanded offering presumably contributed to more students coming to TSU specifically to major in music. Such was the case with Kelly Miller Smith. About Smith, Bass wrote,

Kelly Miller Smith of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, a sophomore at A. & I. State College who hails from the all Negro City in the Bayou State. Smith attended grade and prep school at Bolivar County Training School in Mound Bayou, but graduated from Magnolia Avenue High School, Vicksburg, MS. From the first he shown [*sic*] a marked interest in creative writing with special consideration of poetic expression. In high school he played xylophone in the school Symphony Orchestra and took a keen interest in music which no doubt played an important part in his deciding to major in music here at State College. Smith hopes to attend a graduate school in music after he receives his degree here.<sup>39</sup>

By 1941 TSU instrumental music organizations had become firmly established as a faculty directed activity. According to Fancher (1975), the 1941 – 1942 *Bulletin* suggested that descriptions of extra-curricular activities could be

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<sup>36</sup> The staff for the production included Billy Jones, Producer; Benton Adams, Dance Director; Don Q. Pullen, Musical Director, Professor Redwine, Lighting Effects; Clarence Searles, General Manager; and Professor Hayes, Bandmaster and Advisor. The cast included, Ray, Director of Collegians, Edward Hale; Marie, Collegian’s Dancer and Sweetheart, Gladys Shockley; Sylvia, Collegian’s Vocalist, Evelyn Hodges; Beechie, Assistant Director and Advisor to Ray, Billy Jones, Quincy, Collegian’s Chief Arranger and Composer, Don Q. Pullen; President M. K. Gale, College Prexy, H. Wilhoite; Ted, Solo Trumpeter, R. Rushton Miller; and the Collegians. *Bulletin*, 1938, 1.

<sup>37</sup> University Catalogs between 1931 and 1939 only provided information on the College Orchestra.

<sup>38</sup> The same volume of the November *Bulletin* (1939) detailed a History Study Club Gathering in which the guests were entertained by the College Orchestra, solo by Miss Bettye Jeane Dugger and a musical number by the College Trio under the direction of Mrs. Marie Brooks-Strange. *Bulletin*, 1939, 5.

<sup>39</sup> E. Bass, Jr., “Campus Chatter Salutes,” *Nashville Globe*, March 22, 1940, 8.

placed into two broad categories: Activities for students for which the faculty assumed dominant leadership roles, and student organizations led by student officers. In the first category several activities were listed: Music Activities, Concert Singers, College Choir, College Band, and College Orchestra.

That Hayes was the person most often associated with Band and Orchestra activities is clear from the inclusion of his name in nearly all of the instrumental music publicity. For example, the *Bulletin* (1941) reports on the bi-annual campus visit by Tennessee's Governor and General Assembly where the Orchestra and Concert Singers, under Hayes' direction, provided dinner music. That same year, another *Bulletin* article reported,

The Tennessee State Collegians presented an interesting concert at Cameron Junior High School on Friday night, Feb. 21 [1941]. The program was sponsored by the music department of the Cameron Music Department of the Cameron school under the direction of Mrs. J. D. Hayes, wife of Prof. J. D. Hayes, instructor in chemistry and Director of Band at A. & I. The concert was given in the gymnasium before a capacity crowd of 1,000 grown ups and children. During the course of the program, the rhythm and syncopation of the Collegians grew to such a peak that the youthful music lovers turned into a group of swinging jitterbugs, as they left their seats and danced and jumped down the aisles onto the stage where they exhibited the latest swing dance capers. Mrs. Hayes has requested the Orchestra [The Collegians] to return at an early date.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Mildred Porter (personal conversation, 2007), TSU student from 1937 – 1941 remembered the student-led Collegians, which she says were directed by both Don Pullen and Rushton Miller. She also recalled the College Band, which performed at football games.<sup>41</sup> According to Porter, Hayes was in charge of the Collegians and the College Band.

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<sup>40</sup> *Bulletin*, 1941, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Photograph of the 1941 TSU Marching Band can be found on page 27 of dissertation, "THE ARISTOCRAT OF BANDS: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors" by Reginald A. McDonald.

As the program continued to mature, Hayes began to collaborate with other universities in the community to produce various music concerts and events.

According to a *Bulletin* (1941), for example, the “Fisk and Tennessee State Swing [Departments] staged a ‘Battle of Swing,’ on April 4, from 5 to 8 in the Crystal Ballroom. Over 400 Fiskites and Ayenians were on hand to root for their respective musical aggregations.”<sup>42</sup>

At colleges and universities across the United States, the advent of WWII precipitated an abrupt halt to all but the most necessary curricular activities. College newspapers nationwide published notices that reflected the following sentiment:

In connection with [an] effort to create a reserve pool to provide the armed forces with a steady flow of educated personnel, the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy desire to make their position clear with respect to this matter of continuance of college education. They are convinced that able-bodied young men must and will be controlled in their decisions solely by what appears to each to be his duty in helping to win this war. The country can no longer afford to have young men proceed with their education at a moderate tempo. Extra [curricular] activities not specifically directed toward physical or mental preparation for the war effort can no longer be encouraged.<sup>43</sup>

Such was apparently the case at TSU. Indeed, little evidence exists of TSU Band and Orchestra activity from the fall of 1943 through the summer of 1946, a period which covers the war in Europe and the Pacific and the first months after the war’s end. Professor Hayes, who had garnered almost iconic status as the chief architect of TSU’s growing Band and Orchestra program, was notably absent from the 1943 – 1944 catalog.

Not surprisingly, those activities that were most distinctly male activities suffered the most at TSU and elsewhere in colleges and universities. For example: TSU football game programs show that no games were played in 1944 and 1945;

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<sup>42</sup> Each band played for one half-hour period alternately (*Bulletin*, 1941, 8).

<sup>43</sup> *Shurtleff Pioneer*, Alton, IL, May 29, 1942.

Band and Orchestra course offerings are not listed in the 1943 – 1944, 1944 – 1945, and 1945 – 1946 University Catalogs; School Choir and Organ presentations were the only performances for the Inaugural Program of TSU’s second President, Dr. Walter S. Davis in 1943; and vocalist Modestine Young led the audience in the singing of the “Star Spangled Banner” at the 1944 Homecoming Game. No band played for the halftime or during the game.

Still, while the Band and Orchestra that had become such an integral part of student life under the baton of Professor Hayes fell silent during those years, the student-led TSU Collegians thrived. A retrospective in the 1958 TSU homecoming program read, “The year was 1943. For the fourth straight year Ayeni [pronounced A and I – nickname for Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College/University] was without a football team as the Tiger potential was off to WWII. Meanwhile the Tennessee State College Collegians were in their ‘heyday’ as one of the best college swing bands in the nation.”<sup>44</sup>

While much of the accepted wisdom concerning the genesis of the TSU instrumental program suggests that it began in 1946, a significant body of evidence strongly supports a different notion. Indeed, documents, which include *Bulletins*, newspaper articles, photographs, and various anecdotes, support the arguments that TSU instrumental ensembles were active as early as 1913.

During the early years of its development, the instrumental program steadily gained stature under the direction of several forward-thinking music educators: Harold Brown, Clarence Wilson, Marie Brooks-Strange, and Jesse Hayes. Periods of diminished activity, which occurred from 1930 – 1937 and 1943 – 1946, appear to have been influenced to a marked extent by broader socio-cultural influences, particularly the Great Depression and WWII.

Notably, evidence strongly suggests that there were two distinct kinds of student music participation from 1912-1946: student-directed organizations and faculty-directed organizations. Faculty-directed ensembles included the Band and the

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<sup>44</sup> Ayeni Homecoming Program, “The Early Beginning – 1943,” Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University. November 27, 1958, 4.

Orchestra, which increasingly became more separate in their specific functions as the instrumental program as a whole developed. However, they tended to evidence some decline during the lean years at the University. Student-directed groups, on the other hand, demonstrated a seamless existence, even through the years when the Band and Orchestra were less active. The popular Collegians, for example, remained viable from its inception in 1930 through 1946.

Finally, Marie Brooks-Strange appeared, at times, to single-handedly administrate the entire Music Program. Evidence suggests that she likely directed instrumental ensembles as well as the Chorus (her primary ensemble) during periods of transition between instrumental directors. Her efforts and the work of her musician colleagues, both student and faculty, cultivated a tradition that would grow to become one of the vibrant postwar instrumental programs in American Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

### **Tennessee State University Historical Highlights**

#### **Band Directors**

- J. T. Gray – 1918 to 1919
- Harold Brown – 1923 to 1926 (Bachelor of Music Degree from Fisk University)
- Clarence H. Wilson – 1926 to 1930 (Diploma from Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes, Bachelor and Master Degrees from Northwestern University, also studied a broad in Europe)
- Jesse D. Hayes – 1937 to 1943 (Bachelor of Education Degree from Illinois State University and Master of Science Degree from the University of Illinois)
- Jordan D. “Chick” Chavis – 1946 to 1951 (Bachelor and Master Degrees in English from Fisk University)
- Frank T. Greer – 1951 to 1972 (Bachelor of Music Degree from West Virginia State University and Master of Music Degree from Marshall University)
- Dr. Clifford E. Watkins – 1972 to 1979 (Bachelor of Music Degree from Clark College in Atlanta, Master and Doctoral of Music Education Degrees from Southern Illinois)

- Edward L. Graves – 1979 to present (Bachelor of Music Education Degree from Tennessee State University and Master of Music Education Degree from the University of Illinois)

#### **Faculty Directors of the Collegians**

- Clarence H. Wilson – 1926 to 1930
- Jesse D. Hayes – 1937 to 1943
- Jordan D. “Chick” Chavis – 1946 to 1951
- Daniel Owens 1967 – 1972
- Benjamin Kirk 1979 to 1997
- Charles Dungey 1997 to 2003
- James Sexton 2003 to present

#### **Music Department Chairs**

- Noah W. Ryder – 1913 to 1917
- Helen Hagan – 1918 to
- Clarence H. Wilson – 1926 to 1930
- Marie Brooks Strange – 1930 to 1948
- Dr. Herbert Mells – 1948 to 1953
- Dr. Edward C. Lewis – 1953 to 1967 & 1968 to 1981
- Frank T. Greer – 1967 to 1968 (ACTING CHAIR)
- Dr. Ralph Simpson – 1981 to 2004
- Dr. Robert Elliott – 2004 to present

#### **Music Department Milestones**

- 1912 – October 4, 1912 became an official Music Department (along with Business, Industry, Physical Training, and Academic)
- 1914 – Piano and Vocal Lessons offered for \$2.00 a month
- 1917 – [TSU] Music Department furnished music for the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Middle Tennessee Teachers Association [In-Service]
- 1917 – May 18, Patriotic Music played by [Tennessee] State Normal Band at Flag Ceremony (Tennessee’s Governor Rye was in attendance)
- 1918 – November 14, [TSU] bought first grand piano... instrument was placed in the school Chapel

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- 1919 – Vocal music becomes a requirement of ALL STUDENTS for 4 years
- 1919 – The School Orchestra and Band listed among course offerings in the school catalog
- 1919 – March 21, J. T. Gray... Director of the School Band's first concert
- 1922 – Band supplied with new instruments and uniforms
- 1922 – Catalog states that the School Chorus maintains a membership of 50 to 100 students
- 1926 [between 1926 and 1930] – Clarence H. Wilson and Laura Averiette co-wrote the second school song... eventually becoming Tennessee State University *Alma Mater*
- 1927 – 1<sup>st</sup> Music Scholarship offered for piano and voice students
- 1930 – February 29, School Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Clarence H. Wilson presents live performance over WLAC radio station [WLAC radio station had a strong signal which could be heard all over the southeastern United States... African Americans were the largest population of listeners to WLAC radio station during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century up onto the early 1960s]
- 1930s? – Concert Singers perform for President Franklin D. Roosevelt
- 1930 – Curriculum implemented for teacher education leading to the Bachelor of Science Degree
- 1932 to 1933????? – The Concert Singers directed by Marie Brooks Strange performed for the Chicago World's Fair
- 1937 – October, College Band perform for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Tennessee A. and I. State College under the direction of Professor Jesse D. Hayes
- 1938 – November, College Band presented a Varsity Show entitled "The Collegians" to raise money for uniforms... Band Director Jesse D. Hayes
- 1940s (LATE) – Dr. Eddie Goins forms the Meistersingers; Dr. Goins developed this ensemble to national prominence
- 1941 – March, College band directed by Professor Jesse D. Hayes performs a concert at Cameron Junior High School

- 1941 – September, Clarence H. Wilson [TSU Music Department Director 1926 - 1930] elected President of the National Association of Negro Musicians
- 1941 – TSU Collegians participated in the battle of swing against the Fisk [University] Collegians
- 1943 to 1945 – No College Band activities documented... Collegians was functioning under student leadership
- 1947 – First woman participant in the marching band... playing the oboe
- 1947 to 1948 – Marching Band performed in the “Capital Classic” in Washington D. C.
- 1949 – TSU Collegians voted the best collegiate dance orchestra in the United States in a nationwide poll conducted by the Pittsburgh Courier
- 1950s (LATE) – The Marching Band earns nickname “Aristocrat of Bands”
- 1952 – Dr. W.O. Smith starts tenure at Tennessee State... Dr. Smith would later become the first African-American member of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra
- 1955 – TSU Marching Band is the first black college band to perform for a televised National Football League [NFL] game half-time.
- 1958 – The first black college chapter of the Music Educators National Conference
- 1960s (LATE) – The Marie Brooks Strange Music Building is constructed... name in honor of the department chair who served from 1930 – 1948.
- 1961 – The first black college marching band to be invited to perform in the Presidential Inaugural Parade (President John F. Kennedy)
- 1962 – The second black college invited to become a member of the National Association of Schools of Music (the highest accreditation agency for college/university music departments in the United States)... Tennessee State University was also the first state of Tennessee college/university to become a member of this prestigious organization.
- 1964 – TSU alumnus Dr. Thomas E. Lyle is named Director of Bands at Alabama State University (Dr. Lyle was the college band director and mentor of the author [Dr. Reginald A. McDonald] of this article “The Early Years”).

McDonald: Instrumental Music Ensemble at Tennessee State University: THE Early Years (1912-1946)

- 1969 – TSU Collegians record first album
- 1983 – TSU Collegians record second album
- 1984 – TSU Collegians record third album
- 1984 – TSU Collegians perform at the Montreaux Jazz Festival
- 1984 – TSU Collegians perform in Nigeria, Africa
- 1984 – TSU Marching Band performs at the Mirage Bowl in Tokyo, Japan
- 1993 – TSU Marching Band invited to perform at Presidential Inaugural Parade (President Bill Clinton)
- 1997 – TSU Marching Band invited to perform at Presidential Inaugural Parade (President Bill Clinton)
- 2002 – Concert Band performs for the Music Educators National Conference Bi-Annual In-Service
- 2003 – TSU Aristocrat of Bands voted as one of the top ten black college marching bands in the United States and invited to perform at the inaugural Honda Collegiate Battle of the Bands
- 2007 – TSU Collegians perform at the North Texas University Jazz Festival
- 2009 – TSU Wind Ensemble selected to perform for the Tennessee Music Educators Association Annual In-Service
- 2010 – TSU Collegians invited to the University of Notre Dame Jazz Festival