

MIDLANDS GROUP MEETING

Wolverhampton 20th May 2017

Phil Bennett presented **Mr Jelly Roll** to a near capacity gathering of Midlands members. He began by telling us that despite enjoying the music of Jelly Roll Morton (real name Ferdinand La Menthe) for over fifty years, he believed that this was his first program devoted exclusively to his music.

Phil mentioned that Morton had claimed to have made recordings in Los Angeles as early as 1918, but the earliest that have been identified date from 1923 and were made in Chicago. The first record played was from this June session for Paramount, **Muddy Water Blues** by Jelly Roll Marton (sic) and his Orchestra. Morton replaced the usual pianist in the New Orleans Rhythm Kings to play his own composition, **Milenberg Joys** in a recording made for Gennett in Richmond, Indiana in July 1923 and recorded **Someday Sweetheart** with Jelly Roll Morton's Jazz Band for Okeh back in Chicago in October of the same year. The **London Blues** (named after the London cafe in Chicago) was recorded as a piano solo for Rialto in Chicago, April / May 1924 and **Mamanita** (labelled incorrectly as 'Mamamita') was one of eleven piano solos made for Gennett in Chicago on June 9th. 1924. **Fish Tail Blues** by Jelly Roll Morton's Kings of Jazz followed in September 1924, this time for Autograph. The last of these early recordings was **Sweetheart O'Mine**, (sounded like Frog-i-more Rag, with variations) a piano solo for Vocalion in Chicago, April 1926. A very loud record made by an early electric process.

In late 1926 Morton signed a contract to record exclusively with Victor, and this resulted in some excellent recordings made with a variety of New Orleans musicians, living in Chicago and hand-picked by Morton, under the name 'Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers'. We heard **Black Bottom Stomp**, **Sidewalk Blues**, and **The Pearls**, recorded in the Webster Hotel, Chicago. The huge jump in recording quality and the greater skill of the musicians prompted the comment "What a difference a year makes", from one of our group.

The next recording, **Mr Jelly Lord** by the Levee Serenaders, Vocalion, Chicago 1928, reputedly has Morton on piano in breach of his Victor contract, but the consensus at the meeting was that the piano was so subdued, it seemed unlikely that Morton was the pianist.

Kansas City Stomp was by the Red Hot Peppers, but recorded in New York in 1928 and featured only one musician, other than Morton, from the Chicago sessions. **Deep Creek**, also New York 1928, was by Jelly Roll Morton and his Orchestra and **Pep**, a piano solo

from 1929. **Tank Town Bump** was again by Jelly Roll Morton and his Orchestra, recorded in 1929. (A 'Tank Town' is a place on the railroad where a locomotive takes on water). In 1930, Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers recorded **That'll Never Do**, sadly, Morton's Victor contract was terminated later that year due to the repercussions of the Depression.

A revival of the New Orleans style of jazz led to Jelly Roll Morton's New Orleans Jazzmen recording **Oh Didn't He Ramble** and **Climax Rag** in September 1939 for Victor, followed by **Original Rags** as a piano solo in December for General. The final record played was **Panama** by Jelly Roll Morton's Seven, recorded January 1940 for General; Morton died the following year.

Many of the records Phil played were master pressings (rather than dubbed), issued many years after their original release - an indication of the great interest later shown in one of the most important jazz composers and arrangers in the New Orleans style, (and also an outstanding pianist), Ferd 'Jelly Roll' Morton.

Our thanks go to Marilyn for the delicious cakes and refreshments and of course to Phil, for a delightful evening, most certainly worth the fifty years wait!

Richard Parkes