

NEW ORLEANS JAZZ CLUB

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YOSHIO AND KEIKO **TOYAMA**

OUR FRIENDS FROM JAPAN

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Yoshio and Keiko Toyama

Japanese Friends of New Orleans and Jazz

(Editor's Note: This article is written from letters, articles and a few personal observations, therefore no by-line is given. It is the result of a close friendship between Japan, especially the Toyamas, and New Orleans.

It has been my privilege to know Yoshio and Keiko since their first visit to New Orleans in 1968. They were learning about the music and the city and I was learning about Buddy Bolden.

It was over ten years later that they helped arrange my first overseas trip as Curator of The N.O. Jazz Club Collections of The Louisiana State Museum to bring Louis Armstrong's first cornet and the bugle he learned to play on to a "Satchmo" festival in Tokyo. It was an unforgettable time.)

I. EARLY DAYS IN JAPAN

Yoshio Toyama was born in Japan in 1944, towards the end of World War II. He began playing trumpet at age 14 and was greatly inspired by Louis Armstrong. He attended Waseda University where he met his future wife, Keiko. He got his degree in Economics and Keiko in Fine Arts. They met as being members of the Waseda University



YOSHIO AND KEIKO in New Orleans, 1971.

Photo courtesy Yoshio Toyama

through the back door.

He saw many U.S. Jazz bands in the next few years, including Ellington, Basie, Hampton, Krupa, Eddie Condon, Pee Wee Russell, Pete Condoli, etc. and frequently ran errands for them.

He first met Louis Armstrong in Kyoto in 1964 and Louis let him blow his horn, which was one of his all time thrills.

Meanwhile, Keiko became a very proficient banjo player.

II. FIRST TRIP TO USA - LOS ANGELES AND NW ORLEANS

In 1968, Yoshio and Keiko made their first trip to the U.S.A. They took a JAPI

New Orleans Jazz Club. Musicians from the New Orleans Rascals were also members of that club.

In 1963 George Lewis and his band came to Osaka. Yoshio went there to hear them, but with little finances, he slept under a bridge to save money. When the Lewis band members found that out, they chipped in a few bucks and the sponsors of the tour, Allan and Sandra of Preservation Hall, snuck him into the concerts



1968 JAM SESSION AT PRESERVATION HALL. L to R: Joe Watkins, Kid Thomas Valentine Keiko and Yoshio Toyama

Photo courtesy Yoshio Toyama

Japanese ship bringing immigrants from Yokahama to Los Angeles to save money and bring more baggage.

They were met in L.A. by Bill Bacin and members of the N.O.J.C. of Southern California. Bacin and club members took care of them and let them stay in their homes. They slept late one morning and woke to no one in the house they were staying in. A quote from Yoshio:

"On the kitchen table there was five dollars and a letter welcoming us to the U.S., and as they both had to go to work, they leave instructions to go to a nearby park and \$5 for us to spend!!! We were complete strangers to them, only thing they knew about us was we love Jazz and we were going to New Orleans to study Jazz. We met many people like them in the USA."

Yoshio was only 24 years old when he made his first trip to New Orleans. Through the generosity of the Jaffes and Larry Borenstein, they found an apartment on Bourbon Street, around the corner from Preservation Hall and above Vaucresson's Creole Cafe (624 Bourbon).

Again, a quote from Yoshio:

"When we lived on 624 Bourbon, third floor apartment, Lars Edegran and Orange Kellin used to come by with old sheet

music from the John Robichaux collection at Tulane Jazz Archives. We used to practice them. One day we heard a knock at the door and there was Mr. Vaucresson. We thought he was mad. Well, he said to us. 'That was you practicing? If you practice, why don't you play for two hours around dinner time down in the patio. We will feed you two meals a day from our Creole menu.' "

Later when Keiko was looking for a banjo, Mr. Vaucresson, (Robert), who was a cousin of Johnny Dave, said maybe Lawrence Marrero's widow may have one. Johnny Dave played banjo with the great Sam Morgan band.)

Yoshio commented, "Everybody was after Marrero's banjo, but his widow did not want to give it up, so she used to say, 'Oh, the banjo was destroyed in a hurricane.' But it was not, and thought when she heard about a Japanese girl looking for a banjo, she wanted it to go to Japan for her husband, Lawrence, never made it there."

The Toyamas were in New Orleans through 1969 and returned again for a two year stay in 1971. They listened and sat in with the bands at Preservation Hall and elsewhere. In September, 1971, Barry Martyn invited them to join his band to tour Europe for six months and for another six months

around the U.S. They saw a lot of the world and played with many Jazz greats.

III. MUSIC CAREER BLOSSOMS IN JAPAN AND ELSEWHERE

Yoshio and Keiko now travel around the world, but no longer need to pack their own cooking utensils to make ends meet. They have been the house band at Tokyo's Disneyland since 1983 and play there five days a week.

They frequently appear at the Los Angeles Jazz Festival; N.O. Jazz and Heritage Fest; Manassas, Denver Summit, Sacramento and elsewhere. Their list of recordings both with their own, "Dixieland Saints," and with other Jazz greats is long and impressive. Many are in the GHB catalog.

An interesting review was written by Bob Pattie from Australia about a recording Yoshio did with Ralph Sutton in Japan, half in 1987 and half in 1990. The review was printed in "Mainly Jazz" magazine from St. Kilda. Could not make contact down under, so hope we will not be sued for quoting his words. From Bob Pattie: "When I was first asked to review this CD I was apprehensive as I have not been impressed by most Japanese traditional jazz bands that I have heard. They mostly sound regimented to me and tend to stick to "Warhorse" tunes. I purposely delayed putting the recording on to listen to it.

What a pleasant surprise I got when the first notes came on - beautiful jazz from Yoshio and Ralph. I thought I had put on one of my Ruby Braff records. At last I have heard a good Japanese trumpet player - lovely tone and lovely ideas."

They returned to New Orleans, via Los Angeles annually in September and with a large number of "Wonderful World of Jazz" members. In New Orleans, the musicians on the trip pay tribute at the Louis Armstrong statue, at George Lewis and Buddy Bolden grave sites and other locations.

IV. DONATION OF INSTRUMENTS TO NEW ORLEANS KIDS AND SCHOOLS

MENTS TO NEW ORLEANS KIDS AND SCHOOLS

Around 1994, Yoshio and Keiko decided to do something to pay back their good times in New Orleans. They opted to find instruments to send and donate for young musicians in New Orleans schools. To date that amounts to over 300 instruments.

Eventually, "The Wonderful World Jazz Foundation" was formed with the purpose of sending band instruments to schools and organizations to thank New Orleans for "the music Jazz which was a great present from New Orleans, USA and Satchmo."

Again, a quote from Yoshio:

"I wrote to a newspaper in Japan about our campaign of sending horns to kids in New Orleans.

'Back in 1994 Japanese student studying in Baton Rouge get shot to death by mistake, and also there were lots of crimes by youth using guns and young children's drug and gun problem was a big issue. I wanted to do something for children of New Orleans. By sending them trumpets from Japan, I thought I might be able to do something. This activity may remind people in New Orleans and troubled children, Satchmo's great life coming out from ghetto and live life of great artist. And also it may help keep tradition of jazz in New Orleans alive and help grandsons and daughters of Satchmo to become another Satchmo.'

When we wrote about this activities on Japanese newspaper we had a lot of donations and instruments.

And among them was a donation of 1,000,000 yen (\$10,000) from one of the Lion's Club in Tokyo. One of the board members happened to be our good friend who used to play bass in amateur New Orleans style band, and decided to donate one million yen worth of horns.

So we asked my friend ex-pro drummer in Satchmo style band who now works for instrument dealer and by his effort we had a fantastic discount on Taiwan's Jupiter musical instruments horns.

One million yen turned to 35 horns, 10 trumpets, 10 trombones, 10 clarinets, 2 tenor sax, and 3 alto sax all brand new. And on each case it carries plate shining saying this is a present from Lion's Club.

Lots of people joined in for our activities sending us horns for New Orleans. But we did not know how to carry them to New Orleans.

Our good friend Jazz singer, Dolly Baker has been living in Japan and sings with us all the time. She heard about our activity and she told another jazz singer who lives here, Joan Shepherd, who used to sing with the new Glenn Miller Band. She asked her friend who was a vice president of United Airlines, and they took care of transportation.

Now we are continuing this activity under our own Wonderful World Jazz Foundation, with members of 250 people. And we get full help from Nippon Express Co., Ltd. Japan's leading cargo company for transportation of instruments to New Orleans."

* * * *

The donation of instruments came from many sources in Japan, often from individuals who enclosed their gifts with very heartwarming letters. A few are quoted as follows:

Trombone from Mr. Michiko Kitamura
Mr. Toyama,

I learned about the activities of your Wonderful World Jazz Foundation from The Mainichi News Paper, and was deeply moved and decided to send you the trombone my husband loved so much.

He loved jazz (Dixieland) so much but he passed away two years ago with cancer. He always talked about visiting New Orleans when retiring, and was really waiting for that day to come. I really feel sorry that he could not make his lifelong dreams come true. I wish to give his trombone a chance at least to make it to New Orleans

instead of himself.

I will be more than glad if his horn could be of some help for the children of New Orleans. He would be much delighted too.

* * * *

Trumpet from Ms Noriko Akiyama
Mr.&Mrs. Yoshio & Keiko Toyama

I learned about you two reading news paper. I found this trumpet at my mother's house when I helped her moving this spring. That trumpet, my mother's youngest brother, my uncle who was staying at my house preparing for the entrance examination for university used to play for me, around the days of my entering elementary school.

I lost my father when I was 4 years old and I was living with three of us, my mother, my uncle and me. My uncle was so gentle and sweet and he eased lonely heart of childhood day greatly, and his trumpet is a memento of my gentle uncle.

He also passed away and I kept this trumpet for a while but it looked so lonesome without nobody to play it. Finding out about Mr. & Mrs. Toyama's activities, I'm sending you this trumpet hoping you can find somebody to play it. It is very old and may be out of shape, but for children of New Orleans.

* * * *

Clarinet from Mr. Takahisa Horiuchi 1994
September 11
Dear Sir,

Here is a clarinet I told you about on the phone a couple of days ago. My daughter played it in high school band. It's been a long time and might be out of order but please make good use of it. (--This horn was Buffet clarinet in excellent condition!--Toyama)

My daughter happened to bear my first grandchild last night!!! If this horn is going to be used by lovable Uncle Satchmo's grandchildren, I will be more than glad.

MEMORY OF CLARINET

It was almost 50 years ago, in middle of the mountain, small village's tiny school. It was a small school for first and second grade kids only who could not commute to main school far away from the village. We only had 10 to 15 kids, and a teacher who lived right next to the school taught all of us together. He was quite a character, around age 45, with ol' time mustache and ancient German type uniform, he looked like he was from 19th century. Music lessons there, with no piano or organ, we all sang to the melody played by his precious clarinet. It was around the time Japan went into Second World War, we kids sang Japanese military songs to the melody played by his clarinet. Scales were not do-re-mi, but ha-ni-ho-he-to-i-to, Japanese ABC. It's my real experience, good and bad, my memories of long long time ago in sepia color.

Although I grew old now, no musical talent, except sing KARAOKE once in a while, I love to listen to beautiful nice music.

I hope all the kids in the world grows up to be like Uncle Satchmo, who always bring fun to people so warm and so gently.

* * * *

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for sending me your foundation news. I was worried if my brother's horn can still be of some use, for it's very old and glad to find out it can be used.

I received mail from you today December 12 and it happened to be the day my brother had passed away. So I hurried to my late brother's photo and placed your news there.

I also was deeply moved with the letter of thanks for instrument. I can feel your sincere heart to cherish and love instruments, and feel very satisfied sending you that trumpet.

Sticker and badge of foundation is now on his picture. I think my brother is very glad now.

Early in the morning, before school and also before going to work, I remember like yesterday him going to distant river bank to practice trumpet.

Hope this activity keep on and lead to success. And hope this ring of musical friendship reach out to children of New Orleans and this Earth be happy and peace place.

1994 December 15

Michiko Sato

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The Wonderful World Jazz has sent instruments to the following:

Preservation Hall Foundations's children's music program, Ethan Graham; Jerry Brock's Louisiana Music Factory (N.O. Jazz Foundation); Jonathan Bloom's N.O. Public School Jazz Outreach Program; Shannon Powell, drummer we used to take care of around 1971. Kevin Smith's Fearless Tigers Cultural Art Center Treme Jazz Program. And Doreen Ketchems, who teaches at Treme School (just started.)



YOSHIO AND KEIKO, 1999. (They never age).

Photo courtesy Yoshio Toyama