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Preview

PART I: 1934

Chapter 1: Get Off at 125th Street, and God Be with You

February 1934. Timme sets foot for the first time in New York City. He gets a shock when he hears that his music has been all but silenced by the Great Depression. Defying the finger-wagging blacks and whites, he takes the A train up to 125th Street in Harlem to see for himself.

Chapter 2: Don Redman Sparks the Apollo, John Hammond Offers a Tour

In Harlem, the world's most extraordinary city within a city, the Baron finds his music. At the Apollo Theater, Timme meets his bandleader idol, Don Redman, and the key to "Open Sesame" John Hammond. The wealthy jazz benefactor and ice cream soda buff offers our Dane a private tour of the Harlem scene.

Chapter 3: Stompin' at the Savoy to Mighty Chick Webb

In the heart of Harlem, on Lenox Avenue, lies the block-sized music and dance mecca, the Savoy Ballroom. The young John Hammond takes Timme there in his chauffeured limousine. Hundreds of black couples jitterbug to the nonstop music of the Chick Webb and Willy Bryant bands. A "Battle of Jazz"—and what a ball!

Chapter 4: Take Off Those Shades, We Know Who You Are!

John Hammond leads the way to the Saratoga, where master of ceremonies Jazzbo booms out the names of celebrities as they step through the door. Then to the 101 Ranch, where notorious Dutch Schultz tosses out a wad of bills to the crowd. And on to Pod's and Jerry's, where Billie Holiday enthalls.

Chapter 5: Scat Master Leo Watson Zaps It with "Z-o-o-o-t!"

In a week, John Hammond teaches Timme more about jazz and introduces him to more musicians than a European music lover could imagine. The Onyx Club is a place for after-hours jam sessions. There the Baron meets Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, guitarist Teddy Bunn, and the wild scat singer and drummer Leo Watson.

Chapter 6: From Met Opera to Empire Ballroom—and Benny Carter

Timme's father, Baron Palle Rosenkrantz, was Denmark's first writer of mystery novels. A number of his more than eighty books were translated into English. His New York publisher, "Mr. Adams," invites the senior baron's son out for dinner and the Metropolitan Opera. Mr. Adams dozes off, and Timme heads for the Empire Ballroom to catch Benny Carter, who befriends Timme and takes him back up to Harlem and some low-market clubs.

Chapter 7: At the Shim Sham, a Date with Young Billie Holiday

Benny Carter takes Timme and Teddy Wilson to Dominique's and the Hollywood Beer Garden, musicians' hangouts, where it turns out the proprietor had worked for Timme's uncle, down in Virginia. Uptown at the Shim Sham, they catch a kazoo band and fast-rising singer Billie Holiday, who invites Timme to a private party.

Chapter 8: Jake Vandermeulen Loses Everything but His Shorts

Most people would call a man who loses everything down to his underwear a loser. But Timme called Jake Vandermeulen a friend—one he was sorry to lose after the Beiderbecke-clone cornetist and jug buddy threw in the towel and moved back to the wilds of Michigan.

Chapter 9: At Beefsteak Charlie's, There's Adrian Rollini

Our dead-tired Dane stops for a bite at Beefsteak Charlie's—and spots Adrian Rollini. The pioneer bass saxophonist and vibraphonist is having a

beer. “Come with me,” says Adrian, and off they go to meet the singer Red McKenzie, the legendary guitarist Eddie Condon, young saxophonist Charlie Barnet, and others of note.

Chapter 10: Who Said Danish Baron? Why, He’s Just a Gigolo!

Time for the Baron to meet the King of Swing. Benny Goodman reminds Timme of a schoolteacher, though Benny thinks Denmark lies in Norway, with Stockholm as its capital. After Timme talks his way into a job as a pay-per-dance partner in Billy Rose’s nightclub so he can hear more jazz, Benny spots him and tells his drummer Timme is a fraud—“just a gigolo!”

Chapter 11: “My Technique Terrifies Me!” Says Willie “The Lion” Smith

Willie “The Lion” Smith is the master of Harlem stride piano and seizes every chance to prove it. John Hammond introduces Timme, and Willie tells how he went to war in 1917 and came home wearing a chest full of medals. “It was a tough war,” he says, “and I was proud and happy that I won it.”

Chapter 12: Art Tatum Is Down at Basement Brown’s!

Art Tatum is the world’s greatest pianist, Teddy Wilson tells Timme. If the blind player had been white, he would have been a new Paderewski. At Basement Brown’s, Timme and friends find the virtuoso at a tippy upright. When some white gangsters complain about the “noise,” Timme tells them to shut up—and gets an “earful.”

Chapter 13: To Fats Waller with Love, Honeysuckle Rosenkrantz

Bosom buddy Fats Waller may have laid the groundwork for Timme’s fatal ulcer. The pianist and composer of “Ain’t Misbehavin’” and “Squeeze Me” dubs him “Honeysuckle Rosenkrantz,” a takeoff on his own song, “Honeysuckle Rose.” Fats shows Timme the Harlem gin mills. At the Hurricane Club, it’s “Happy Birthday!”

Chapter 14: Mezz Mezzrow Puts Timme on a Little Pink Cloud

Clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow wrote a bestseller called *Really the Blues*, in which he tells of sliding down the dope trough into a prison cell. When the Baron meets him, Mezzrow is peddling marijuana cigarettes. “Tea is not a narcotic!” he insists. “Smoke it and you get really clear in your head.” Timme takes a few puffs and goes out of his head.

Chapter 15: Canceled: Josh Billings's Greenwich Village Gig

Eddie Condon introduces Timme to Josh Billings. The skinny little drummer is broke, and his drums are in hock. So he plays with a couple of whiskbrooms on a beat-up suitcase. Josh gets a gig in the Village and invites Timme along to carry his suitcase. In a stickup joint, Josh's wristwatch is stolen. How does he get it back?

Chapter 16: At Timme's Farewell Party, Fats Waller Takes a Bath

Time to go home to Denmark. Timme throws a farewell party, inviting Fats Waller, Mezz Mezzrow, and other friends. They bring *their* friends, including James P. Johnson, J. C. Johnson, and some ladies from the Cotton Club. Fats disappears. Then a mysterious flood threatens from under the bathroom door.

PART II: 1936–1969

Chapter 17: Checking Out Harlem's Other Halls of Pleasure

After a summer visit in 1936, the Baron again sails to New York in 1937—and stays eight years. (There's a war on, you know.) One day he finds himself the only Dane at a gathering of the Danish West Indian Society—with “For Dancers Only” on the jukebox. Timme takes us to the Harlem Bräuhaus and the musical Hotel Woodside (“Jumpin’ at the Woodside”).

Chapter 18: Voutie! Slim and Slam, Wow! Inez Cavanaugh

Chick Webb's autographed picture opens doors. In a cellar joint across from the Apollo, young “Slim and Slam” break 'em up. Slim Gaillard sings and strums guitar. Slam Stewart bows his bass solos while humming them. Timme asks the black singer Inez Cavanaugh for a dance and wonders aloud: “Where have you been all my life?”

Chapter 19: Plugging a Tune to W. C. Handy, Cutting a Record for RCA Victor

W. C. Handy, the music publisher who wrote “St. Louis Blues” and other hits, likes the tune Timme brings him and refers him to Maceo Pinkard (“Sweet Georgia Brown”) for new lyrics. Six months later, Timme recovers the unpublished score. He forms a dream band to record “Is This to Be My Souvenir?” and other numbers for RCA Victor. Inez Cavanaugh makes her world debut as a jazz singer.

Chapter 20: Louis Armstrong Kick-Starts the Mel-O-Dee Music Shop

The war is on. In 1940, Timme is cut off from foreign income. Inez suggests opening a record store up on Sugar Hill. In the back room, he installs an upright piano so Stuff Smith, John Kirby, and other combos can rehearse. On opening day, Louis Armstrong breezes in and orders fifty dollars' worth of shellac records. Timme's in business—for a year.

Chapter 21: Harry "Father" White, Jitter Bugs, and Bill Coleman's Band

He is fourteen years older than the Baron, who looks upon Harry White (b. 1898) as his oldest son. "Father" White worked as a drummer from 1914, switched to trombone in 1923, and played with Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club in 1927. White coined the term "jitterbug," at first meaning an alcoholic. Bill Coleman's band gets conned at Kelly's Stable on 52nd Street.

Chapter 22: Turning Off the Lights at Mel-O-Dee Music Shop

Little stores need capital. But at 20 percent interest? And the loan sharks could bite hard. Bigger men install a bigger jukebox and pinball machine. When the record supply dries up in 1943, Mel-O-Dee throws a bang-up party with live music. The Baron moves downtown to "live with the ofays."

Chapter 23: A Danish Nobel Laureate Digs Harlem by Night

Thanks to Timme's articles, Scandinavian tourists in New York seek him out as an "unpaid and many times unthanked guide to the Harlem jazz scene." His tours often end at some private late-night bash. Denmark's Nobel Laureate author Johannes V. Jensen and his radiologist son leave a dinner party to meet Timme for Ladies Night at the Savoy Ballroom.

Chapter 24: Eddie Condon and That Good Ol' Nicksieland

The Savoy is gone. Only a few basement haunts and spots are left down in Greenwich Village. About 1920, Nick Rongetti, a lawyer turned speakeasy operator, opened the landmark Nick's Tavern, at Sheridan Square. In this "Nicksieland" refuge, Chicago stalwarts Pee Wee Russell, Muggsy Spanier, George Brunis, and Eddie Condon shine. No dancing allowed!

Chapter 25: There Is Just One King, and He Is the Duke

The only King of Jazz is "The Duke." The Baron met Ellington in London in 1933, when he came knocking at the door in Grosvenor House. Timme

reflects on his idol's stature and the endearing qualities that made his friend human, such as his skillful handling of drummer Sonny Greer when Sonny and all his gongs and traps fell backward off the bandstand.

Chapter 26: Here Lived Diamond Jim Brady and Jazz Baron Rosenkrantz

Claremont Robert Morris is a worthy successor to an earlier tenant of 7 West 46th Street, Diamond Jim Brady. A marble plaque reminds that the rags-to-riches Irish immigrant lived here. Our apartment seeker meets Morris, who offers him a sumptuously furnished suite for a hundred dollars a month.

Chapter 27: The Stupendous "Stuff" of Jazz, Leroy Gordon (Hezekiah) Smith

At the Onyx Club, Timme meets a violinist who ranks with the greatest improvisers of jazz. Stuff Smith is an unpredictable genius. Timme, himself a frustrated fiddler, is mesmerized by "this little, nimble fellow who almost stands on his head when he plays" and tells off-color stories from the bandstand.

Chapter 28: Discovering, Befriending, Recording Erroll Garner

It's 1941, the war is raging, and Denmark is occupied. Timme befriends the WNEW disc jockey Art Ford and gets his own jazz radio show. Hickory House and the Onyx are his favorite haunts. At Tondaleyo's, the intermission pianist is a young talent from Pittsburgh. Timme discovers and is first to record Erroll Garner.

Chapter 29: A Great, Big, Fat White Christmas '44

On Christmas Eve 1944, a homesick Erroll Garner shows up with a tree and a poinsettia. Inez puts a blank disc on the recording machine. Garner, who can't read music, plays all the yuletide songs he knows. "Great Christmas," they call the record. Next day, Timme corrals Stuff Smith, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and others for a party "so full of music I thought I'd burst!"

Chapter 30: Timme's Recording Service and Threatened Jazz Concert

The Jazz Baron opens a private recording studio in his plush midtown apartment. Musicians book him to record their live broadcasts on acetate. Ellington, Condon, and Mildred Bailey are regular Saturday afternoon customers. In 1945, Timme rents Town Hall for a jazz concert, and runs into big trouble. Drummer Gene Krupa to the rescue!

Chapter 31: Zeb Julian's Dream and Claude Thornhill's Joke

Zeb Julian is one of the unsung geniuses of jazz guitar. (Timme's judgment is confirmed by two contemporary colleagues, Billy Bauer and Bucky Pizzarelli.) When they met, Zeb was working for Claude Thornhill, whose players "were frightened to death of him. So was Claude, who loved him, too." Timme explains.

Chapter 32: Bud Powell Plays Not Being There

Bud Powell, the most revered of bebop pianists, fools and disturbs many musicians with his eccentric behavior. He loves to play the game of "not being there." One night in 1947, Timme sees the master leaning against a lamppost outside Three Deuces. A simple question evokes no immediate answer.

Chapter 33: Jam Sessions Outlawed? Come to Café Bohemia!

The American Federation of Musicians had banned record-making since 1941. Local 802 forbids members from playing at free jam sessions. So clubs levy a door charge. In fall 1947, Timme launches Friday night sessions at Café Bohemia. His friends turn out. He introduces the Swedish clarinetist Stan Hasselgard. All goes well until . . .

Chapter 34: Tatum Leads a Black Sheep into Piano Battle at Ruben's

The Baron spends most of his time on Swing Street, with excursions up to Harlem. At the blue-collar Hollywood Beer Garden, weekly "piano battles" feature Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson, and a young Billy Taylor. Timme throws a party for pianist Herman Chittison. Buddy Tate shows up with his whole band. Louis Armstrong's second wife, Lil Hardin, rings Timme's neck for a new shirt.

Chapter 35: A Last Record Session and Tour of Haunts

Timme takes over the late Billie Holiday's cellar flat on West 84th Street. Here he and his English friend Doug Dobell arrange a "good-bye" recording session with some old-timers: saxophonist Pete Brown, trumpeter Johnny Letman, guitarist Bernard Addison, bassist Hayes Alvis, and former Ellington drummer Sonny Greer. Timme takes Dobell on a disappointing tour of old Harlem haunts.

Chapter 36: Coleman Hawkins: The Picasso of Jazz

In a Danish newspaper tribute shortly before he died in 1969, Timme remembers his recently departed friend Coleman Hawkins—“The Boss when it came to tenor saxophone.” A hawk that flew high and finally landed in a room on Central Park West, Hawkins was a sad man with a big color TV and an old fridge full of beer.

Epilogue

Bente Arendrup was Timme Rosenkrantz’s favorite niece and devoted admirer. “Topsy,” as he called her, recalls the day in August 1969 when the news reached her home in Hellerup, north of Copenhagen. “The lights went out. The fun, the joy, and the music stopped. And it has never been the same since.”