

cabinets. At Frank's invitation, we moved aside a pile of dusty LPs, fading photocopies, old bills, reel-to-reel tapes, and cassettes on a low table beside his desk and sat down on it.

"I'll show you something I got recently," Frank said, opening an old X-ray cabinet full of eleven-by-fourteens. "It's an original photograph of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, late 1924, with Louis Armstrong, who joined the band in 1924 and stayed through '25, and it's autographed by Louis to Fate Marable, the riverboat bandleader—Louis worked with him out of New Orleans from 1918 to 1921. Where the hell is it?" He opened another drawer. "Believe me, it's here."

"Is it your most valuable photograph now?" we asked.

"I don't know," Frank growled from within the cabinet. "I never buy them for their value. I don't know what they're worth."

We asked how he had got started buying jazz photographs.

Frank slammed the drawer shut and sat down at his desk, empty-handed. "I began to buy—to collect—jazz photographs in the mid-nineteen-fifties, because I couldn't afford to keep buying the jazz seventy-eights that I wanted," he said. "I was twenty-something years old, and the records always seemed to cost more than I had. There was an old Broadway-stage photographer named Leo Arsene, with a studio on Seventh Avenue below the Winter Garden Theatre. I'd go there and he'd be selling his negatives for a quarter or fifty cents apiece, so whenever I had a few bucks I went over. Arsene used to hold the negatives up to the light like a deck of cards and shuffle them. 'You want Mr. Lucky Millinder?' he'd say. 'Mr. Hot Lips Page? Mr. Cootie Williams?' I didn't know much, but even then I'd think, Jesus! Stop! You're scratching them all up!" He shook his head.

Handing us a folder of Fats Waller photographs, Frank said, "Maybe you'd like to look at these," and went on, "In those days, I worked at a lot of low-level jobs in the backwaters of the entertainment business. I was a page at NBC, I schlepped film cans around for some film companies—that kind of stuff—and what I didn't spend on records and pictures I spent on girls." He paused to peek over our

shoulder at the Fats folder: Fats surrounded by his big band in a sound studio; a bug-eyed Fats goofing at a keyboard; Fats, age eighteen, in a precocious formal portrait; Fats on the streets of Harlem, in a series of terrific candid shots, greeting the populace, gabbing with his pal and piano-playing peer Willie (The Lion) Smith; Fats, circa 1935, climbing into a gorgeous oversized automobile. "The guy could certainly take a picture," Frank said.

"I did a lot of interviews in the late fifties with old musicians, many of them old Kansas City musicians—old Basie-ites—for magazines like *Jazz Journal*, *The Jazz Review*, *Coda*," he continued. "I was like the water boy at *The Jazz Review* at that time. I also sold magazine subscriptions. I sold them to eat. All of a sudden, one day, a call came in to *The Jazz Review* and Martin Williams, the editor there, said to me, 'Hammond's looking for you.'" That was John Hammond, Frank explained, the legendary record producer and jazz patron, who in the sixties had invented the modern-day reissue program for classic-jazz recordings by bringing out a series of boxed retrospective sets—of Fletcher Henderson, Robert Johnson, Billie Holiday—which became educational touchstones for a whole new generation of jazz listeners. "I produced all those babies, under Hammond's auspices," Frank said. "I'd go in to work at ten o'clock and Hammond would be recording. I'd go into the studio with him as his assistant A. & R. man. Hammond involved himself in way too many things—he loved to be involved, and was on the boards of half a dozen charitable organizations, maybe more—and so along toward the middle of the afternoon he'd look at his watch and announce, 'Oh, I have to go to a meeting. Frank, you finish up for me.' I got all my early experience that way. What better job could a jazz lover and record collector have? It was beautiful."

Frank paused for a moment. "What was my biggest 'coulda been?'" he asked rhetorically. "In 1969, when they were putting together the 'Harlem on My Mind' show at the Met, I supplied all the sheet music, the records, and, of course, the jazz photographs. In trying to dig stuff up, I went to see the great Harlem photographer James Van der Zee, who at that



There Were Conflicting Opinions on How to Combat the Shanghai Flu

time was starving to death in his photo shop on Lenox Avenue. I could have bought his whole store for three hundred dollars. He begged me. I didn't have three hundred cents."

Suddenly, Frank beamed with pleasure. "I got Popsie Randolph's stuff, though," he said. "Popsie was a band boy for Woody Herman and Benny Goodman, and after the war, when Popsie said he wanted to be a photographer, Benny bought him his first camera and he started taking pictures. This was probably in '47. Popsie was a press agent's dream, because he worked cheap and he worked quick. He shot on the fly at gigs, and he shot commercial portraits, eight-by-ten glossies, headshots, group shots. He died about ten years ago, and his sons were trying for the longest time to sell his stuff. Four hundred and fifty thousand dollars they wanted for those negatives. There was Elvis Presley, Eric Clapton, the Drifters with Ben E. King—all these different rock acts. That's where the

money is, of course. But there was also some terrific Count Basie and Lionel Hampton and, of course, Benny. Well, Popsie's sons couldn't find a buyer, and finally I took about sixty, seventy per cent—thirty thousand negatives. I've looked at them all. But it's only in the last few years that I've begun to print them up."

We asked why he didn't get some help.

"Because it would drive me nuts," he said. "Someone would clear this room up in a day, but I'd be in a mental hospital for five years. My problem is, I don't want to work that hard. I want to write, I want to play music—I play the piano O.K., and I'm working on getting better. The fun of collecting this stuff is that there's no end. You don't know what's out there. Records there's a finite number of—you know that So-and-So made so many records. But with pictures you never know. There's always more. And who can ever have too much Billie Holiday?"

No End

I HAVE a little bit of everybody," Frank Driggs was saying as he led us down his basement stairs. "Six inches of Louis, maybe more. A half foot of Benny, a half foot of Basie, another six inches of the Duke. I've got twenty-one file cabinets. Three of them are sheet music, the rest are all pictures." Frank Driggs is sixty years old and somewhat resembles John Barrymore in his "Grand Hotel" days: he's graying and pale, with sharp features and a good profile. He lives in a long, low stone-faced house out in Flatlands, Brooklyn, with two dogs, a cat, a gopher, a ferret, and, in the basement, what may be the finest collection of jazz photographs in the world. The basement is about fifty feet long and thirty-five feet wide, and is ringed with file cabinets and record