

## Past Perspectives April 2017

### Bandleader Clarence Love

Wonderland Cave had a early soft opening of its underground jazz and big band night club in the spring of 1930, but the “grand opening” of the Cave was at the beginning of the Bella Vista Resort’s summer season that year. The Linebarger Brothers announced in the May 29, 1930, issue of the Benton County Herald, “Clarence Love and his Africans will play the two spectacular opening dances at Wonderland, where the incoming summer guests will be initiated into this natural, underground night club and will enjoy its exclusiveness nightly thereafter.”

The actual opening was to be on June 1, but to avoid dancing on the Sabbath, Love and his band played Saturday night, May 31, from 9:00 p.m. to midnight, and then started again at one minute after midnight Sunday night going 3 a.m. Monday morning.

Carole Linebarger Harter, granddaughter of C.A. Linebarger, has letters her grandmother sent to Carole’s father when he was a law student at Harvard in 1931-32, saying they had received sixty Christmas cards from “orchestra boys” including Clarence Love. So the Linebargers stayed in touch but that one engagement is the only one Clarence Love is known to have played in Bella Vista.

Clarence Love was a native of Oklahoma, having been born in Muskogee in 1908, but he grew up in Kansas City where his love of music developed. Starting in high school, he formed a number of bands over the years and also helped start one of the biggest black booking agencies in the business. In some of his bands, he employed several musicians who became very famous, including Count Basie.

In the April 1985 issue of Tulsa, in an article entitled “Love’s Labor Found,” John Wooley wrote that Clarence Love never became widely famous himself because, “One of the few things (he) didn’t do in music was cut any commercial recordings. Consequently, his career has not received as much attention from critics and historians as...his contemporaries, since recording evidence of his various bands just doesn’t exist.” Love said his inspiration was Guy Lombardo, so in Kansas City he played his “sweet music” in white venues while his contemporaries were playing hot jazz in black clubs. He told Wooley he played sweet music until he

moved to Dallas in 1933 where he began playing all-black dances. He laughingly said, "I'm up there playing this soft music, and that wasn't what they wanted. So I played a hot tune, and everybody started jumpin' on the floor and runnin' away from each other. I hadn't *ever* seen *that* before....Come to find out, that was the new style...(but) I'd been at the El Torreon Ballroom (in Kansas City) all that time, you know, playing sweet music."

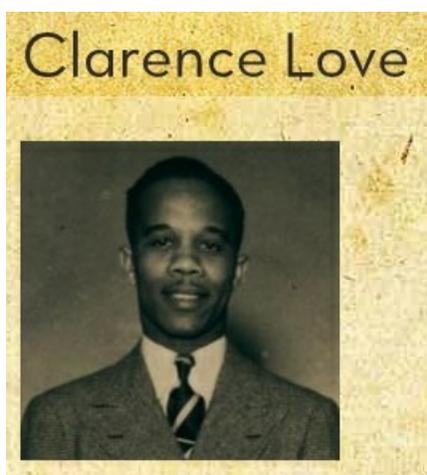
Love also founded an all female group called the Darlings of Rhythm, managing and touring with them during the years of 1942-46, and then married the piano player, Dorothy. After his father died, he moved back to Tulsa and started the Clarence Love Orchestra. In 1948, he opened his own club, the Love Lounge, where well known musicians such as Duke Ellington would congregate and play. It was the first so called "black and tan" music club in Tulsa, meaning that it catered to both blacks and whites. For the rest of his music career, he owned and operated clubs, and at some point returned to the booking business. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame in 1990, in the categories of saxophonist and band leader, and is reported to have memorabilia on display at the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City. He died in Tulsa at age 90 in 1998, survived by his wife Dorothy.



The Bella Vista News section of the Benton County Herald, dated May 29, 1930, carried this headline announcing the Clarence Love band. From newspaper files of the Bella Vista Historical Museum.



Clarence Love, second from right with saxophone, and his band are shown playing in Wonderland Cave in 1930. The sign above the band says “Patronize Our Hotels Now Open”. The hotels were the original Lodges up on the hill on the east side of Lake Bella Vista, built in 1917-1918, and the Sunset Hotel on the west side, opened in 1929. Photo courtesy of Bella Vista Historical Museum.



Clarence Love was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame in 1990. Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame, [www.okjazz.org](http://www.okjazz.org)