



Ken Crawford, IAJRC Founder and Broadcaster (1925-2006)

We are sad to relate the death of IAJRC founder and twice-former-president Ken Crawford. He co-presented a weekly radio programme from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 'Rhythm, Sweet and Hot.' Along with Mike Plasket, he had originated 'RS&H' at WQED-FM in 1980, just before that station switched to an all-classical music format. The show soon shuffled over to WDUQ-FM (90.5) at Duquesne University in 1981, where it is still running on Saturday nights. Ken retired from the airline industry in 1984, when he was turning 60, and spent his succeeding years focused on broadcasting his personal archive to a great many listeners. WDUQ thought so much of the presentation that in 1998 they started syndicating it to dozens of radio stations throughout North America and Australia. Ken's last appearance before the microphone was in April.

A Pittsburgh native, his love of music started at an early age for he was buying records when he was 8. But to prove that record collectors are not necessarily frustrated musicians, learned alto saxophone and clarinet, and spent his high school years playing in dance bands. Service on the sax in a U.S. Navy band took him to Europe during World War II and he returned home with a collection of records purchased in England, France and Germany. He hauled them home in a duffel bag, sailing on the

Queen Elizabeth. Ken always would credit some of the older collectors of that time, namely Bill Love and Carl Kendziora, for helping him along as a jazz record collector. Eventually working in New York City, he became acquainted with Count Basie and Thelonious Monk, among others. Employment with Northwest Airlines, this allowed him to travel the country to hear music and to build his record collection. Since the early 1960's, many reissuing record companies contacted him for pristine copies of hard-to-find original recordings. His mint-condition original 78s appeared on hundreds of reissue albums on Columbia, RCA-BMG, Stash, Hindsight and many other labels.

His enthusiasm was shared with his wife Glenda Abdo, herself no slouch whatsoever regarding jazz. Some of the folks they called friend were Henry 'Red' Allen, Buster Bailey, Tony Parenti, Sonny Greer, and Zutty Singleton.

Behind Ken Crawford's avid, life-long calling to collect jazz records was more than an acquisitioning streak. We all collect for the thrill of learning jazz history, but his mission was to share it and his enthusiasm for this never wavered. This was true for both his radio audience and those he met face to face.

Kurt Weisbecker was a close friend, a kind of protégé since he was a teenager. And so Kurt was by Ken's side in the final days, playing him CDs of vintage 78s by The Californians and Benny Carter. Ken, surprised by a disc even he hadn't encountered before, remarked that no matter how much time you put in this hobby, one always has so much more to listen to.



Front and center: Ken Crawford, center front, anchoring-away on alto, supported by his sax mates Gene on tenor and Jack Wong on alto.

Back row: double bassist Jim, trumpeters Jim and Milt, and the bone man Bob.

Half of a US Navy swing band, August 1944.

Kurt has commented:

“One evening, we were playing records when I asked him if he had any duplicates. He went over to a filing cabinet and leafed through a small stack of 78s, noticeably avoiding one on the Okeh label that I saw. I asked him what it was, and he told me that it was a Luis Russell. The record, *Mugging Lightly*, had a small rim flake, not in any grooves, that was put there at some long-ago record collectors meeting. Apparently, someone had damaged it while Ken was away and left it on the turntable for him to discover. In the intervening time, Ken replaced it with an unblemished copy, supposedly one that had been the property of Duke Ellington. The damaged copy was a spare and he made mention that he could probably get at least 40 dollars for it [1982]. The about ten minutes later, Ken said, ‘Tell you what Kurt, just take the record.’ When circumstances forced me to sell most of my collection several years later, that record did not leave my possession. Although I have rebuilt my collection, and have had numerous chances to upgrade this 78, I have never done so.”

Today more than 30 stations from San Juan, Puerto Rico to Melbourne, Australia carry the show weekly. He is survived by a sister, Collette Matthews of Los Angeles, and by his friends in the IAJRC.



Precursor to the IAJRC, Ken sharing the sounds at Fort Pitt, Pennsylvania, ca. 1961



Glenda, soon to be Ken's wife, with Jack Teagarden, Bali Kea Club, Brentwood, Pennsylvania, December 1954



Glenda and Ken in love, with the session too, in the Bali Kea Club, Brentwood, Pennsylvania, December 1954

Kenny Davern - clarinet, Tommy Turk - trombone, Tommy Dorsey - trombone, Lee Castle - trumpet, Jimmy Dorsey - alto sax, Buddy Rich - drums, Jack Teagarden - trombone