



## **King-Lincoln**

### **A Legacy of Music**

### **A Cradle for Artists**

#### **Historical Context and Overview**

The King-Lincoln Neighborhood has long been known for its artistic contributions to the city and to the nation. Aminah Robinson has work throughout a number of locations in the community. Students may also be familiar with her children's books or may know her from her living in the community, her workshops, or through family members who have attended Columbus schools. She was mentored by Anna Bishop, writer and poet who wrote of the Blackberry Patch, later the site of Poindexter Village, where Aminah Robinson grew up. Later, muralists took upon themselves to enliven the blank canvases of the neighborhood's walls with murals based on the history of the area. Mentorship is a key piece of the King-Lincoln neighborhood, and extends to other artists such as WPA painter Emerson Burkhart who mentored Roman Johnson, a network of photographers from William Richardson to Kojo Kamau, and into the musical legacy of the community.

By the 1920s East Long Street was already the center of black commercial, social, and entertainment life. Shops, theaters, restaurants, and jazz clubs proliferated. These clubs attracted white people as well. The Plaza Hotel hosted Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Fats Waller—whose appearances would influence young Columbus musicians and vocalists. The Empress movie theater opened in 1920. Mt. Vernon Avenue was equally vibrant, and in the area, the golden age of music was in the popularity of the jazz clubs in the 1940s, especially after World War II when famous musicians played the local scene. If they played in white downtown hotels, they returned to the neighborhood to play long into the night to large crowds and with local talented musicians. Live jazz could be heard in twenty different clubs. There were also five hotels and two theaters—two of which still exist—the Lincoln and the Pythian (King Arts Complex).

The musical scene rapidly disappeared with the Civil Rights era because public areas and accommodations outlawed segregation and the center city was changing with suburbanization and the creation of shopping centers that catered to consumers' love of cars.

#### **Standards Alignment**

##### **Ohio's New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies**

Grade 3, Content Standards Statement 1: Events in local history can be shown on timelines.

Grade 3, Content Standards Statement 3: Local communities change over time.

Grade 8, Content Standards Statement 22: Choices made by individuals, businesses, and governments have both present and future consequences.

HS American History Content Statement 19: Movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, African-American migration, women's suffrage will contribute to social change.

## Learning Objectives

- Explain how artistic endeavors should be broadly defined to include the fine arts, dramatic arts, music, composition, and architecture wherever possible
- Analyze the arts of a community as they reflect the people and institutions, as well as, the politics, or social and economic forces in the community
- Discuss how a national social movement can contribute to local social change
- Explain how works of art, murals, photographs, poetry, and music can be used as primary sources that require historical-thinking skills to interpret history

## Discussion Questions

1. How did the works of Elijah Pierce, Aminah Robinson, and Kojo Kamau reflect changes to the King-Lincoln area and help to better understand the political, economic, or social conditions at various times in American history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. How important was mentorship in the creation of artistic legacies?
3. How can governments or institutions play a role in the legacy of the arts?
4. Blacks and whites did not always play music in the same venues. Popular black acts performed at theaters or nightclubs in the King-Lincoln area; white acts were often found in hotels, ballrooms, or other nightspots, however, one place that drew both black and white acts and was important to play because it broadcast on radio live from Columbus across much of the United States was Valley Dale, a ballroom on Sunbury Road that still exists. How did gradual integration of musical venues contribute to changes in musical styles and instrumentation?
5. How might segregation influence, enhance, or detract from the potential of artists and musicians?

## Extension Activity

Research any of the following Columbus musicians, how they got their start, where they played in Columbus, and their musical legacies: Charles Parker and Parker's Popular Players (early 20<sup>th</sup> century); Thomas Howard and his People's Orchestra (early 20<sup>th</sup> century); Madam Rose Brown (1920s-1930s); Rusty Bryant (starting 1950s and continuing for decades); Tippy Dyer Orchestra (WPA and 1940s); Nancy Wilson (1950s and continuing); Dr. Bop (1950s DJ); Harmonaires (who were influenced by the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots); Supremes (coming from East High); the Vallejos (East High); Four Pharohs (East High and Central High); the Enchanted Five; Archie Stomp Gordon; Jimmy "Stix" Rodgers; Christine Kittrell; Gene Walker; Henry "Hank" Marr; Harry "Sweets" Edison; Jeanette Williams Brewer, and Arnett Howard (to name a few). Create a map of the King-Lincoln neighborhood showing where played.

Create a timeline that shows the years when Elijah Pierce, Anna Bishop, Aminah Robinson, Emerson Burkhart, Roman Johnson, Kojo Kamau, and William Richardson worked (or still work) and find images that each created or captured in art or poetry, choose from their works to create a 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century timeline that illustrates the history of some of the decades in which they worked.

## Additional Resources

Meyers, David and Arnett Howard, James Loeffler, and Candy Watkins. *Columbus: Musical Crossroads*, Arcadia Press, 2008

Arts Foundation of Olde Town East. *Listen for the Jazz: Key Notes in Columbus History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1992. Ed Lentz's forward on "East by Northeast" and Edward McDaniel's "The Jazz Cradle of Columbus" are particularly relevant.

Bishop, Anna. *Listen for the Jazz*, n.d.

Columbus Museum of Art. *Elijah Pierce: Woodcarver*, 1992

Kojo Kamau's –<http://www.kojophotosusa.net/>

Arnette Howard – [www.creolefunk.com](http://www.creolefunk.com)

Elijah Pierce - [www.csc.edu/elijahpierce/bio/htm](http://www.csc.edu/elijahpierce/bio/htm)

Aminah Robinson - [www.aminahsworld.org](http://www.aminahsworld.org)

Funding provided by:

