CULTURE HUB *TURNED* CAMPUS CORNER

This past September, I had the privilege of exploring the Beantown Jazz Festival, which took place between Mass Ave and Davenport St. on Columbus Ave. I thought how cool it was that this was happening so close to where I lived, and wondered why we were so lucky. I quickly learned that there was a reason this celebration took place essentially on Northeastern's campus and realized that I was probably one of many, many students who was unaware of the culture that used to, and still does, to some extent, inhabit our beloved Columbus Ave. The street where sophomores walk bleary-eyed to their 8ams is the same one as the epicenter of the Boston jazz scene for most of the 20th century. I invite you to travel back in time, pre-New York Pizza and Dougy P, and explore the incredible people and places that weaved Boston's musical fabric, influencing the progression of American music along the way.

Back in the 1930s, jazz littered Columbus Ave., Mass Ave, and Tremont St. It seemed as if a new club was opening every day. Some of the most important spots were Wally's Paradise, Eddie's Café, AFM Local 535's Union Hall, and The Hi-Hat. These clubs turned over and changed names several times in the decades of their prominence, but one thing always remained: their affinity for jazz. Local and national musicians alike took their turns playing these Boston hotspots, creating a strong community of prominently black musicians in Roxbury and the South End.

Wally's Cafe, located at 428 Mass Ave, has some major staying power—it's still there! The location was originally a club called Little Harlem and then became Little Dixie. In 1947, Joseph Walcott opened

Wally's Paradise, which now goes by Wally's Café. And if a seventy-year-old family-owned Jazz nightclub isn't impressive enough for you, read on. Wally's thrived solely on local talent and neighborhood patrons. Boston Jazz bands and musicians cycled through the club and provided it with an evergreen repertoire. Sunday jam sessions became a popular pastime in the neighborhood, so even when well-known surrounding clubs like Eddie's and the Hi-Hat drew national artists, Wally's remained popular playing good old local jazz. Amazingly, the club never really progressed into newer genres, and is still playing jazz and blues today.

Isreal E. Levine, more commonly known as Eddie, ran the Little Harlem nightclub that inhabited 428 Mass Ave before Wally's did. When the club closed, Eddie moved across the street to a much smaller location and opened Eddie's Musical Lounge, or Eddie's Café, located at 425 Mass Ave. He promoted the club as the most intimate nightclub in Boston, and employed Dean Earl, a pianist who had been with him since the Little Harlem Orchestra across the street. Earl was an incredible accompanist, and Eddie's was the singers' club. By the 1950s, Calypso music had become popular, and Eddie's embraced this trend. Eventually, the club was shut down for licensing reasons and reopened as The Wigwam for a few years. Although many famous musicians passed through the Wigwam, the popularity of Eddie's was never restored, and was closed for good shortly following Eddie's death in 1961.

Local 535's Union Hall was the meeting place for Boston's black chapter of the American Federation of Musicians. 535 was established in 1915, when black musicians realized they wanted their own local that coincided with their priorities. At this time, black musicians were playing all of the jazz that existed. In 1939, they moved into a Union Hall at 409 Mass Ave, right off Columbus. Although there was no official performance space, auditions, rehearsals and jam sessions packed the first floor all day. 535's card-carrying members filled all the clubs on Mass Ave and Columbus. Once a year they came together for the Spring Ball, held in Butler's Hall or Ruggles Hall, both formerly located on Columbus Ave. Ultimately, in 1968, the local was forced to merge with Boston's white Local 9, and the Mass Ave location was sold shortly after.

Donned "the busiest jazz club on the busiest corner," and "America's Smartest Barbeque," The Hi-Hat opened in 1937 at 572 Columbus to an all-white audience. It's owner, Julie Rhodes, had no interest in connecting with the neighborhood around him due to the threat of a tarnished reputation. And as jazz gained popularity, the desire to showcase the genre and its black musicians at the club was purely financial. Rhodes truly had no taste in music: he was more involved with the chicken that the club served and how much money came in at the end of the night. One of the first bands he hired included a man by the name of Sabby Lewis, who fortunately took the musical dealings out of Rhodes' hands. At this point, it didn't matter to him the race of the musician, only that he was popular and would draw a crowd. So, Lewis, an incredible musician in his own right, suggested all the best, and Rhodes would agree. One observer noted that Lewis would come to Rhodes and suggest someone so well-known and obviously unique as Charlie "Bird" Parker, and Rhodes would blindly accept with no inkling of just how good Parker was.

By 1948, The Hi-Hat had become a full-fledged jazz club. Their jam sessions, which were modeled after Wally's, were important in the development of the jazz genre as a whole. For anyone interested in innovative jazz, there was no better place to play. In the beginning, mostly Boston musicians played the club, but eventually it became nationally renowned as a "name-band" club. It was the first Boston club to house Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Count Basie's Sextet, to name just a few.

When these famous black musicians came to town to play the Hi-Hat, there was almost no access to hotel rooms, so they were welcomed into homes in Roxbury and the South End. One of the most common places to stay was the stretch of Mass Ave from Columbus to Tremont. It was common to see these people walking around the block and jamming in living rooms. It was as if these streets were constantly infused with the exciting aura of jazz. And eventually, it was, thanks to radio. Part of the national success of the Hi-Hat can be attributed to shows that were recorded and played on the radio, helping to widen its reach. It was a revolutionary form of marketing for a nightclub playing predominantly black music. Unfortunately, the success came to a screaming halt when the building burnt down in December of 1955. However, the legacy was not forgotten, and popular musicians Hi-Hat alumni from Boston and beyond continued to pay tribute to this important spot with performances in surrounding clubs.

Incredibly enough, these locations and stories are only a handful of the dozens of jazz havens and legends that used to grace the back end of what is now Northeastern. And though they were closed for mostly arbitrary reasons, each loss contributed to the final death of Columbus and Mass as a refuge for art in our city. There are windows back in time, like Wally's, but for the most part, these stories are forgotten and swept under the rug. The blocks that gave budding black musicians a place to be heard and celebrated are no longer, and the streets' new inhabitants, us, have no use for the history lesson. But I like to believe the culture survives to some extent in the few spots that remain, in the houses that are unchanged, and in celebrations like the Beantown Jazz Festival, where the ghosts of music-past can relive the glory days of Boston Jazz.

■ Joanna Moore /(Business Administration/Finance)/