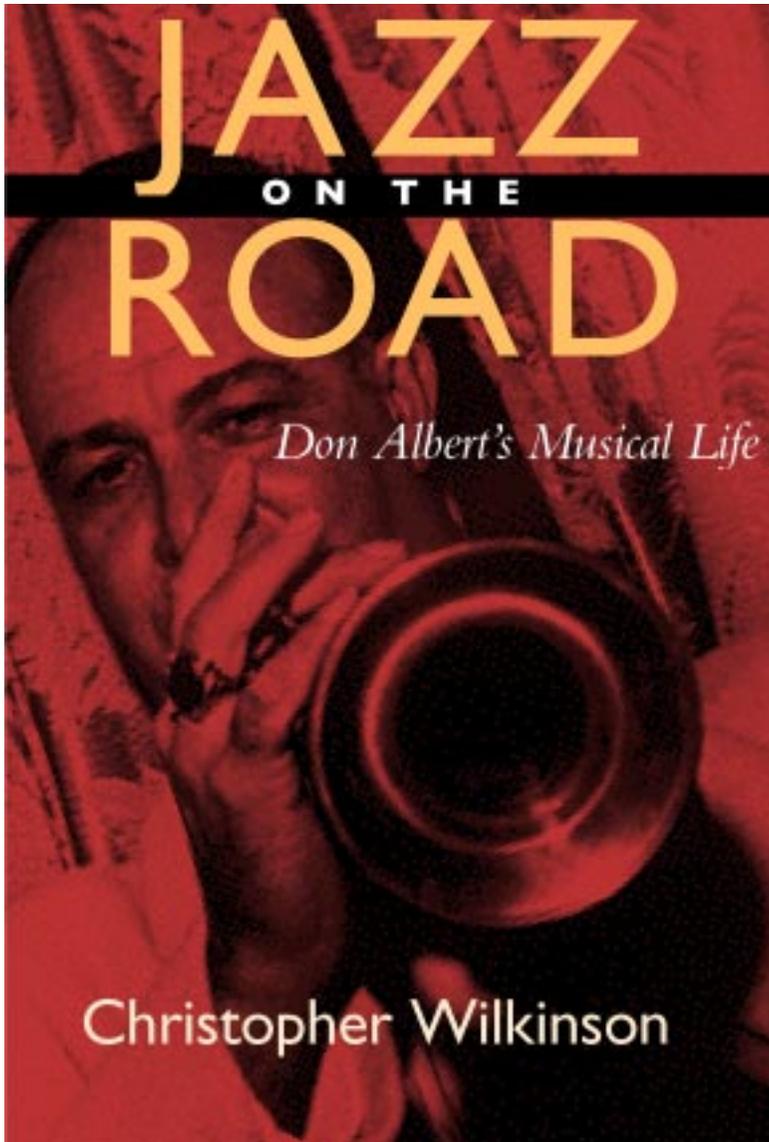


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CHAPTER FOUR

Don Albert, Southwest Territory Bandleader

1929–33

The Dominiques' stay in New Orleans was brief. Although he quickly found work in Bebé Ridgley's Tuxedo Orchestra, Albert Dominique discovered that he could not earn the kind of wages that he had received from Troy Floyd. However hospitable the city may have seemed in other ways, to remain there would require continuously scuffling for gigs while working at a nonmusical, low-paying "day job," such as the one he had held at the Crescent City Mattress Factory prior to his departure in 1926. The only alternative would be to seek employment outside New Orleans. But, early in September 1929, before he could begin looking, a telegram arrived from an acquaintance named Bernard Goldberg, offering to lend him approximately one thousand dollars with which to form a band. Goldberg proposed to book this band for engagements in Dallas between October 12 and 27, during the Texas State Fair.¹

An entrepreneur in the entertainment business, Goldberg may have managed the Alphonso Trent Orchestra at one time and most certainly had heard Floyd's band play at Shadowland and perhaps also in Dallas.² His offer could not have come at a better time, and Dominique quickly began to round up interested musicians. At the same time, he decided to adopt a professional name. The fact that

1. Don Albert interviews, December 30, 1969, August 3, 1978, January 15, 1980.

2. Nathan W. Pearson Jr., *Goin' to Kansas City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 13–14; Sammy Price, *What Do They Want? A Jazz Autobiography*, ed. Caroline Richmond (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 21; Albert interview, January 15, 1980.

Texans apparently had a hard time with “Albert Dominique” was surely one factor in his decision. Goldberg argued for a change as well. “Albert Dominique” sounded too formal, not the name of a band leader. In the words of his son, Kenneth, the name simply “wasn’t catchy.”³ The other Creole musicians that Dominique encountered in Texas largely kept to themselves, spoke only French except when absolutely necessary, and, having completed their engagements, promptly returned to the sanctuary of New Orleans. Dominique, however, had successfully launched a career far from home and had every reason to believe that he could successfully lead a band. To adopt what could be taken for an “Anglo” name was a small price to pay to realize his dream.

His choice of “Don Albert” was partly explained in a letter he wrote to Richard Allen in 1969. Bernard Goldberg suggested that he formally adopt “Don,” a nickname he had been given by one of Floyd’s musicians. The suggestion was probably made while Dominique was organizing his band during the fall of 1929. Six months earlier, he had been identified as “Albert Dominique” in a list of Floyd’s personnel published in the *Chicago Defender*—the only occasion during his career in which his given name ever appeared in print. Although in the letter Dominique implied that he could have kept “Dominique,” “Albert” seemed preferable. It was shorter and without any particular ethnic associations.⁴ Although to his audiences he would always be known as Don Albert, he never legally changed his name. Nonetheless, because it was central to his professional identity, for the rest of this narrative I shall refer to him by his adopted name.

Don Albert planned to form an eleven-piece ensemble, the typical size of dance bands at the end of the 1920s. He named it “Don Albert and His Ten Pals.” As bandleader and *Chicago Defender* columnist Dave Peyton noted, an ensemble of this size “will enable the leader to handle the modern jazz symphonic orchestral arrangement,” that is, the typical commercial chart of that time. Most of the musicians that Albert hired had been playing in two New Orleans bands led, respectively, by Bebé Ridgley and Sidney Desvigne, neither of which was

3. Kenneth Dominique and Lynette Dominique-Washington interview, March 10, 1991.

4. Don Albert to Richard B. Allen, December 3, 1969, Manuscript File of Don Albert—Persons File, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans. Dave Peyton, “The Musical Bunch,” *Chicago Defender*, March 23, 1929, sec. 1, p. 6.

enjoying regular bookings. Having recently arrived in town after spending several years in Baton Rouge, reed man Herb Hall recalled being surprised that, as far as Desvigne's band was concerned, "weren't too much happening."⁵

Albert lured three men away from Desvigne: reed man Herb Hall, singer Sidney Hansell, and pianist Al Freeman Jr. From Ridgley's band, he took saxophonists Louis Cottrell Jr. and Arthur Derbigny, as well as banjoist Ferdinand Dejan. Drummer Albert "Fats" Martin, was an unknown quantity, but, as Don Albert later recalled,

Somebody told me, well he's a good drummer at the Astoria [Hotel on South Rampart Street], an' he came all the way out to the house on Miro Street, an' he looked like a rag'muffin. I said, "Man, this fellow can't play no drums." Well, he gave me a good story about he was playin', an' he could play an' all this, that, an' the other, 'bout "Red" Allen an' Guy Kelly. I said, "Well, this cat might be able to play somethin' anyhow. We'll try him out."

Albert hired two brass players not at the moment affiliated with a band. Trombonist Frank Jacquet had one advantage over would-be competitors: he owned a Dodge touring car. "Whether he could blow or not, I was gonna use him because he had transportation," Albert recalled. As it turned out, Jacquet, a "straight" (i.e., reading) trombonist, could also "blow," and did so throughout the band's entire history. Henry Turner became the band's tuba player. Albert had to wait until he got to Dallas to find a second trumpet player.⁶

With the possible exception of Turner, all the sidemen had prior experience in New Orleans bands, and all were "finished" players. The majority were also Creoles of Color: Cottrell, Dejan, Derbigny, and Hansell came from the Seventh Ward, Hall from the sugar plantation town of Reserve, Louisiana, up the river from New Orleans, and Jacquet from Lake Charles. Albert Martin may have been a Creole as

5. Dave Peyton, "The Musical Bunch," *Chicago Defender*, May 18, 1929, sec. 1, p.

6. Albert told Richard Allen that Ridgley never forgave him for hiring his musicians. Albert interview, August 6, 1973; Don Albert and Herbert Hall interview, August 3, 1978.

6. Albert-Hall interview. Concerning Albert Martin, see Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz*, 84, 145. Danny Barker recalled that "the first let-down I had" as a professional was the fact that Albert, with whom he "came up—his house was facing me as a child"—did not hire him to play banjo in the band. In retrospect, though, he thought it was just as well, since Albert's musicians "never reached the fame or acclaim they should have." *A Life in Jazz*, 111.

well. Pianist Al Freeman, born in Columbus, Ohio, was not, and Turner's ethnicity is unknown.⁷

From New Orleans to Dallas to San Antonio

A convoy of three automobiles carried the newly formed band non stop to Dallas. Although Arthur Derbigny's Model T Ford and Jacquet's Dodge made the trip without incident, Albert's Chrysler broke down near Tyler, Texas. Upon arriving, the musicians checked into a hotel, no doubt located in Deep Ellum. Albert may have gone first to the Tip Top in search of a second trumpet player, but probably found his man, Hiram Harding, at the North Dallas Night Club. Harding had started out in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a band called The Southern Serenaders. He then joined a small band organized by Terrence "T." Holder after Andy Kirk took over Holder's Clouds of Joy. It had become the house band of the North Dallas Night Club when the establishment opened in March 1929, and Holder's group may have stayed there into the fall. If so, Harding may have been ready for a change. Once hired, he remained with Albert's band until its demise in 1940.⁸

As Herb Hall put it, "Because the band was formed so quickly, we had to have some music." Thanks to a fortuitous meeting with the leader of a white band playing at the Adolphus Hotel, Albert was given "a whole trunk full of arrangements."⁹

With further assistance from Goldberg, following the dance dates in Dallas the band traveled to San Antonio to become the house band at a San Antonio nightclub, the Chicken Plantation, whose manager, Raul Estes, needed a replacement for Floyd's band, which was then

7. Annie Lou Hall recalled that Henry Turner came from somewhere in Louisiana. Hall Interview, March 11, 1991.

8. Albert-Hall interview; Lawrence Brown, "Herb Hall," 173; Wyatt D. James, "Texas Tattles," *Chicago Defender*, March 9, 1929, sec. 1, p. 6.

9. Albert-Hall interview. An advertisement in the *Dallas Morning News* of October 10, 1929, announced that "The Harris Orchestra" was performing at the Adolphus Hotel; this seems the most likely source of the band's first collection of stock arrangements. This band was probably also known as "The Harris Brothers' Texans." Additional information provided to me by Thomas Tsotsi in a telephone conversation, November 21, 1996.

about to tour Oklahoma. Assuming the Dallas engagements ended about the same time as the State Fair—Sunday, October 27—the Ten Pals might have started working in San Antonio early in November 1929. They remained at the Chicken Plantation for six or seven months, time enough to pay off Goldberg’s loan. The steady employment and reliable income earned from leading a house band also allowed Albert to bring Hazel and little Kenneth to San Antonio.

When Estes closed the Chicken Plantation to take a job as head gambler at Shadowland, Albert and his Ten Pals moved there as well, becoming the house band for eighteen months. With both the time and a place to rehearse, the Ten Pals created their own head arrangements of blues and popular songs and reworked stock arrangements to make them sound more interesting and to allow the players’ individual timbres to assert themselves. Their initially local audience started to grow when the band began broadcasting from Shadowland over San Antonio’s clear-channel, fifty-thousand-watt radio station, WOAI.¹⁰

Radio not only carried the sound of the Ten Pals away from south Texas, it also brought the sound of such eastern bands as Fletcher Henderson’s and Duke Ellington’s to the attention of both this and numerous other bands in the Southwest. Albert’s band entered the picture at just the time when the distinctive styles of territory ensembles were giving way to a more national style as they adopted elements of the repertoires, arrangements, and sounds of these and other “name” bands. As evidence of this influence, Albert recalled that his band played its own arrangements of several of Duke Ellington’s compositions.¹¹

Over time, the stability of the Shadowland job became a mixed blessing. The pay was reliable, but the audience was small. Albert and his sidemen began to grow restless, particularly after reading accounts of Alphonso Trent’s northeast tour and of Troy Floyd’s successful engagements in Mexico City and Monterrey, published in both the *Chicago Defender* and the *San Antonio Register*, the city’s black weekly newspaper.¹²

10. Brown, “Herb Hall,” 173–174; Albert interviews, December 30, 1969, January 15, 1980, December 30, 1973.

11. Albert interview, May 29, 1972.

12. *Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1930, p. 5; *San Antonio Register*, August 21, 1931, p. 7; John Henry Bragg interview, June 26, 1980; Allan Vann interview, June 25, 1980.

These days, a tour by a professional ensemble is a complex operation. Engagements have to be negotiated, advertising arranged, ticket sales initiated, transportation, accommodations, and meals organized—not only for the performers but also for their road crew, all details handled by a nationally organized agency. Such was not the case when Don Albert and His Ten Pals began to think seriously about going on the road. To propel itself toward national prominence, the band had to take care of its own business. How it did so reveals much about Albert, his values, and his ambitions. Unlike Floyd, Albert believed strongly in sharing with his sidemen the responsibilities of running the band while retaining authority as its leader. This arrangement worked because most of his musicians shared his ambitions. The Floyd band had been a large frog in the small pond of Texas dance music and jazz, but Albert and his Pals wanted to swim in larger and deeper waters.

Of the many risks involved in touring, the most obvious were financial, given the deepening economic slump of the early 1930s. Going on the road traded the certainty of a house band's guaranteed salary for the chance to make more money. Albert, no doubt, took to heart the words of bandleader and *Defender* columnist Walter Barnes Jr.:

Times have changed—and how. Bands, I mean big bands, are now taking to the road rather than hold one stand indefinitely. There's more money on the road and in barnstorming, even one-night jumps. . . . Radio has so popularized good music that the smaller towns want and are willing to pay to hear good bands in person.¹³

Engagements in “the smaller towns” would be essential to the success of any tour by the Ten Pals.

The band required reliable transport to travel. Driving to Dallas and on to San Antonio by car made sense, but would not do for extensive tours. In the event of a flat tire, an accident, a wrong turn, some musicians could get separated from the rest, fail to turn up for hours, and thus jeopardize that night's performance. A bus would keep everyone together while also carrying instruments, uniforms, music stands, publicity placards, and other necessary paraphernalia. Hiring a driver would enable players to sleep between engagements. Outfitted

13. Walter Barnes Jr., “Hittin' the High Notes,” *Chicago Defender*, March 2, 1931, p. 13.

with signs identifying the ensemble traveling within, the vehicle could also serve as a rolling advertisement.

To promote solidarity and to raise the necessary start-up funds, Albert organized the Ten Pals as a “commonwealth band.” All members, having an equal interest in its success, shared equally in its prosperity and suffered equally in times of adversity. At the end of each one-night engagement, or once a week during an extended stay, the band’s earnings were divided into shares, one for each player. Albert received a second share to cover operating expenses, including fueling and maintaining the bus.

Troy Floyd had paid his men a fixed salary (when he paid them at all) regardless of the income he received for his band’s performances. The commonwealth principle ensured that everyone would profit equally from what was anticipated to be the band’s increasing success. In the best circumstances, the band received a guaranteed amount for a job plus an additional percentage of the host establishment’s profits for the night. More often, it played “percentage dates,” receiving only an agreed-to portion of the venue’s receipts. Although the musicians could easily see how large a crowd was and thus estimate fairly accurately what the band’s earnings ought to be, in later years, Albert made a point of watching as customers paid to enter a venue to make sure his players received their due. For all of its promise, however, the chief virtue of the commonwealth principle was one of necessity: Albert really had nothing else to offer his musicians except the chance to share equally in the fruits of their collective labor.

Whereas some bands applied the commonwealth principle to all decision making, this was not true of the Ten Pals. Albert did the hiring and, reluctantly, the firing of musicians. Although tours may have been discussed by the players in advance, no evidence indicates that they decided when and where to travel or that they voted whether or not to accept a particular engagement. In talking with Howard Litwak and Nathan Pearson about this aspect of his work as a bandleader, Albert said, “The commonwealth part came in where the money was concerned, but I selected all of the jobs.”¹⁴

Albert delegated the day-to-day operations of the band first to pianist Al Freeman then, after Freeman’s departure, to reed man Louis Cottrell Jr., whose job it was to keep the books, pay the players, and call rehearsals. At times, Cottrell was assisted by Frank Jacquet and

14. Albert interview, 1977.

Fats Martin. Albert's practice of appointing musicians from other sections than his own to manage the band continued a tradition characteristic of many New Orleans bands in the past.¹⁵

The band's "treasury," the first manifestation of the commonwealth principle, began to accumulate during the Ten Pals' tenure at Shadowland. Later to have many uses, at first it enabled the band to acquire a small, second-hand bus in which to tour. In 1980, Herb Hall explained to Sterlin Holmesly that the treasury was started with money the band received for playing requests at the night club:

They were gamblin', so the guy [would] go into the back and win him a little money, come up and give us a tip, you know what I mean. . . . Well, we had enough money to buy an old used bus. And so that's what we did. We bought the bus.

So essential (and possibly so decrepit) was this bus that once it was purchased, the band always set aside the funds necessary for its maintenance before paying itself a night's wages. As Hall put it, "that was taken care of first so we could get to the next town. . . . and what's left, then we divide[d] it."¹⁶

The other sources of funds for the band's treasury were fines that Albert levied against members who were late for a rehearsal or who failed to conform to the band's dress code—showing up for work wearing the wrong (or worse, no) necktie, for example, or with shoes untied or unshined—and similar misdeeds. This system was carried over from Floyd's band, but whereas Floyd allegedly fined his musicians to get money to pay gambling debts, in Albert's band these funds went into the treasury, to be drawn upon as needed.

Fining musicians for failing to maintain a professional appearance and conduct reflected the value placed on these qualities during the 1930s by many black musicians. Walter Barnes began another of his *Defender* columns with the observation, "One of the best and greatest things to make an orchestra a success is good discipline." He went on:

Few orchestra leaders remember that the public is watching the way he

15. Albert interview, 1969. William Schafer noted that New Orleans brass bands had "a *manager*, usually someone in the rhythm section, who took care of bookings, finances, advertising, and a *leader*, usually a trumpet or clarinet player, who was musical director on the job" *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*, 127n.47.

16. Herbert Hall interview, February 23, 1980.

and his men conduct themselves. It would be a great thing if musicians in general would stop to think that the public nowadays wants its entertainment in a clean-cut way. . . . Your appearance is half the battle. Remember this, fellow musicians, try at all times to look your best and try to be a good fellow.¹⁷

The image of the Ten Pals was important to Albert. He had used a portion of Goldberg's money to purchase the band's first set of uniforms. Over time, the Ten Pals acquired several sets of tuxedos, dress shirts, ties, and shoes, the venue and season determining what would be worn on a particular occasion.

Among the most arresting facts concerning Don Albert's band is the number, extent, and frequency of its documented tours. Twelve occurred between 1931, when it first went on the road, and 1940, when it folded, and gaps in the newspaper record raise the possibility of others. The shortest lasted two or three weeks, the longest more than a year. In all, they represent the equivalent of four years and ten months of traveling—45 percent of the ten years and eight months of the band's existence.

The band played throughout the eastern half of the United States: from Texas to Florida, north to upstate New York (but never in New England), west as far as eastern South Dakota, and back down to Texas. It performed in major cities and in small towns. It played for dances in hotel ballrooms, nightclubs, and high school gymnasiums and accompanied stage shows from the orchestra pits of movie theaters. In later years, it carried its own troupe of dancers and other entertainers. Whenever possible, Albert sought opportunities to perform on local radio stations, much as he had while at Shadowland, confident that those who heard his band's broadcasts would want to pay to see the band perform.

According to Albert, launching the first tour was not easy, because after the band was gone only a few days Shadowland's managers insisted that he return:

Well, we left one time; we hadn't gotten five hundred miles from here when they called me to come back. They couldn't get a replacement. I had to cancel all of the dates and come back. . . . Stayed six months. . . . Went on the road again, had a lot of bookings; called me back, couldn't get a band. 'We need you back.' So I went back and said, 'Look, this is

17. Barnes, "Hittin' the High Notes," *Chicago Defender*, October 10, 1931, p. 5.

the third time; this is it; next time I'm going. I've got to get to New York while I'm good.' . . . Played for three months, then I left. I never, I didn't come back anymore.¹⁸

It is unclear whether Albert was describing a series of abortive attempts to go on the road or was instead summarizing events surrounding the band's first three tours.

That Shadowland reengaged the Ten Pals after each of the early tours is documented by accounts in the *San Antonio Register*. Whether its management interfered with Albert's ambitions cannot be confirmed. On the contrary, Herb Hall implied that the decision by Shadowland to cut back on the number of the band's performances each week was the impetus to begin touring: "We left the Shadowland when things got bad during the Depression, and they had cut down to three nights a week."¹⁹

If any musicians had been reluctant to tour before, this reduction in the number of nights of work probably persuaded them that the potential rewards of the road outweighed the risks. Walter Barnes's claim that there was money to be made even in small towns, which was surely corroborated by anecdotal evidence from other Texas bands, should have been another catalyst. Despite the depressed national economy, there were pockets of prosperity in the Lone Star State, thanks to the discovery of oil in east Texas in 1930. The benefit of this development for black entertainers was noted in March 1931, at the start of the summer traveling season, in a column in the *Chicago Defender* datelined Marshall, Texas:

A big oil boom is on in east Texas and the time is ripe for six good stands, Tyler, Kilgore, Henderson, Longview, Marshall, and Jefferson, for circuses and carnivals. More than two million dollars has changed hands between the oil magnates and the farmers in Harrison county alone.²⁰

"Good stands" for tent shows might be equally rewarding for the Ten Pals.

A further incentive for going on the road was that regional competition for engagements was declining even as touring was on the rise.

18. Albert interviews, April 17, 1977, January 15, 1980.

19. Quoted in Franklin S. Driggs, "A Biography of Herbert Hall," *Jazz Journal* 11 no. 1 (January 1958), 10.

20. "Circus Folk Prepare for Good Season," *Chicago Defender*, March 7, 1931, p. 7. For a summary of the oil boom's impact, see Seymour V. Conner, *Texas: A History*, 232–237.

Floyd's band had left the Southwest for the upper Midwest during the summer of 1931. Trent's band was in disarray following a fire in Cleveland that destroyed all of its instruments, music, and uniforms, probably the result of a dispute between the bandleader and a local gangster. In Oklahoma City, Walter Page watched helplessly as talented members of his Blue Devils band were hired away by Bennie Moten of Kansas City; ultimately, Page would join them. Southwest bands, once confident that their respective territories were sacrosanct, now confronted the fact that rivals were prepared to encroach if there was the promise of employment. Having broadcast over the radio, the Ten Pals could reasonably anticipate a favorable reception even in cities and towns formerly the exclusive domain of another group.²¹

The First Tour: Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Louisiana

The band's first tour was initially reported in the May 16, 1931, issue of the *Chicago Defender* in an article headlined "Don Albert's Pals End 2 Years Stand" and datelined Little Rock, Arkansas. It combined fact and fiction in ways that would be encountered repeatedly during the band's history. According to the article, the band had spent two years at Shadowland, when in fact it had only been formed eighteen months before and had played about six months at the Chicken Plantation. The story also stated that "The bunch is expecting an offer from the Columbia Broadcasting company after playing over the chain through KTSA for more than two years." Floyd's band had broadcast over KTSA, Albert's over WOAI and for far less than two years.

Despite the hype, the notice marks the first time a national newspaper carried word of the Albert band. It is also noteworthy for including the band's first published personnel list:

Don Albert, Brass and Manager

Hiram Harding, Brass and Vocal

21. Concerning the Trent band's misfortunes, see Henry Q. Rinne, "A Short History of the Alphonso Trent Orchestra," 243-244.

Franke [*sic*] Jacquet, Vocal and Brass
 Herbert [*sic*], Vocal and Reeds
 Louis Cottrell, Reeds
 Phillander [*sic*], Reeds and Arranger
 Albert Freeman, Jr., Piano and Director
 Henry Turner, Bass
 Albert Martin, Jr., Drums
 Ferdinand Dejan, Strings
 James Johnson, Bass Viol
 Anderson Lacey, Vocal and Violin

Despite misspellings and the omission of the last names of two sidemen, the list is valuable in part for noting changes in personnel. Vocalist Sidney Hansell and saxophonist Arthur Derbigny had departed for New Orleans. Precisely when they quit cannot be determined, but according to Herb Hall's wife, Annie Lou, Hansell's replacement, Anderson Lacey, was hired when the band was in Dallas, possibly en route to Little Rock. He departed the band before July 25 and was replaced in September, when Albert hired Sam Burt, a Chicago native, who, among other talents, was a gifted conductor; "the best I have ever seen," recalled Albert.²² Derbigny's successor, Philander "Phil" Tiller, a Little Rock native, probably joined the band when it arrived there early in May 1931. Added to the band, bringing its total personnel to twelve, was New Orleans string bassist Jimmy Johnson, who, if Albert is to be believed, was the first to play that instrument in a Texas band. Johnson had already played the role of jazz pioneer as a member of Charles "Buddy" Bolden's band around 1905. Born in 1884, and thus considerably older than the rest, "Old Man" Jimmy Johnson would remain in the band until his death from kidney failure in 1937 (see Fig. 11).²³

22. Burt is first mentioned as a member of Albert's band in several articles reporting on its second residency in Oklahoma City, including Barnes's "Hittin' the High Notes," *Chicago Defender*, September 26, 1931, p. 5; see also Albert interviews, December 31, 1973, April 17, 1977.

23. "Don Albert's Pals End 2 Year Stand," *Chicago Defender*, May 16, 1931, p. 5; Herbert and Annie Lou Hall interview, March, 11, 1991. Concerning Johnson's role in the Bolden Band, see Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, pp. 48, 76–77 Albert–Hall interview.

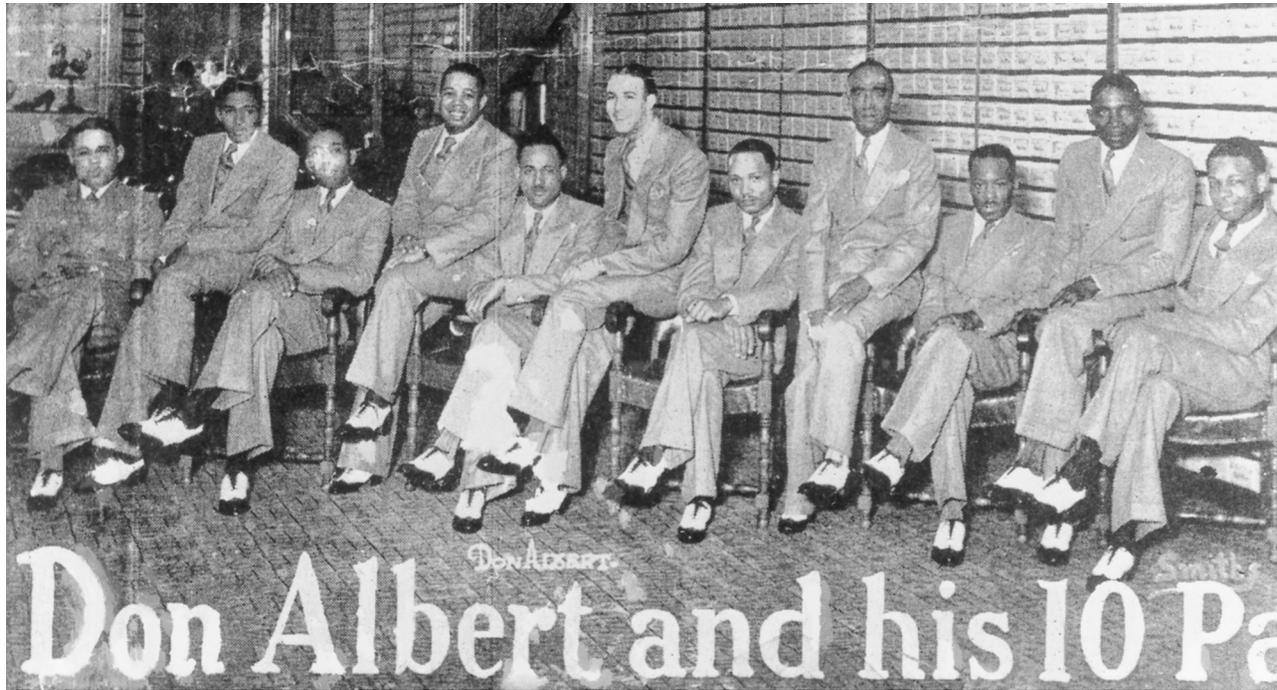


Figure 11 The Ten Pals show off their new shoes, San Antonio, 1931. From left: Louis Cottrell, Ferdinand Dejan, Herb Ha "Fats" Martin, Frank Jacquet, Don Albert, Al Freeman Jr., Jimmie Johnson, Hiram Harding, Henry Turner, Phil Tiller, Sam (holding baton).

Phil Tiller was an arranger, and his arrival represented a major step for the band. Now no longer totally dependent upon stock and head arrangements, it could develop a repertory that included both original compositions and new arrangements of popular tunes, and thereby produce a distinctive sound. Tiller's labors were soon reflected in an advertisement for an engagement in Oklahoma City during July 1931, announcing that the band would be "playing a program of full special arrangements." Tiller was the first of six player-arrangers in the band.²⁴

Departing San Antonio early in May, the Ten Pals probably went north to Dallas, stopping in Deep Ellum to hire Anderson Lacey, before perhaps heading to east Texas to take advantage of the local oil boom. From there, by one of several possible routes, the band traveled to Little Rock. There, the Ten Pals undertook a variety of well-received performances, beginning with a broadcast over station KLRA on May 11, 1931. This first half-hour program was followed by two more, on May 14 and May 21. On May 16, advertised as "A Real Hot Colored Band from San Antonio," it played from 9:00 P.M. until midnight at the Rainbow Garden ballroom. Six days later, billed as an "Attraction Extraordinary" and "Dixie's Greatest Dance Band," it presented "a delightful program of music, song, and dance" on the stage of the Arkansas Theater between showings of cartoons, a news-reel, a short documentary on chip shots by golfing great Bobby Jones, and the movie *The Way of All Men*, starring Douglas Fairbanks Jr. The next night the band played for "The Last Dance Ever to be Held at Rainbow Garden," which was for some reason to be turned into a bowling alley.²⁵

The band disappeared from view for three weeks, perhaps traveling elsewhere in the state, then returned to Little Rock to play a dance on June 13 at Willow Beach, a resort located just outside of the city. It was a smash hit:

More than a 1000 people attended the opening dance of the season at Willow Beach Saturday evening. Music for the occasion was provided by Don Albert and His Ten Pals, an orchestra widely known in the South, and said to be one of the best ever to appear in Little Rock. The management of Willow Beach has secured a long-term contract with the orchestra which will play regularly at dances at the resort.²⁶

24. *Daily Oklahoman*, July 24, 1931, p. 10; Albert interviews, 1969, 1977; Albert-Hall interview.

25. *Arkansas Democrat*, May 11, 14, 15, 16, 22, and 23, 1931.

26. "1,000 at Dance at Willow Beach," *Arkansas Democrat*, June 15, 1931, p. 5.

However “long-term” the contract at Willow Beach was supposed to have been, from June 26 until July 12 the Ten Pals played for dances at the Cinderella Garden and then departed for Oklahoma City.

During the course of their time in Little Rock, the Ten Pals acquired the services of booking agent and publicist James Brady Bryant. His first accomplishment was to secure what ultimately became a six-week job at the Showboat in Oklahoma City.²⁷ As the band’s representative for the remainder of the tour, Bryant booked engagements and wrote press releases that were published in such locally circulated black weekly newspapers as Oklahoma City’s *Black Dispatch* and the *San Antonio Register*, as well as in the nationally circulated *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier*. When, early in August, one week after carrying its first story on the band, the *Courier* announced a contest to determine the most popular black dance band in the country, Bryant lost no time in nominating the Ten Pals. The ten votes that his nomination garnered remained the only support the band would receive. It was dropped from the contest after a month, but Bryant’s intentions were clear. Beyond cultivating a following in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and adjacent states, he was preparing for future tours beyond the Southwest territory.²⁸

Leaving the Showboat during the third week of August, the Ten Pals and Bryant returned to Little Rock’s Willow Beach resort to engage in a “battle of the bands” with T. Holder’s Casa Loma Band on August 22, before going on what *Defender* columnist Walter Barnes reported as “a two-week tour through the southern cities.” The Ten Pals wound up back in Oklahoma City on September 4 for a six-week engagement at the Ritz Ballroom, from which the band broadcast four nights a week over KFJF, initially from 11:00 P.M. to midnight; later broadcasts began at 10:15 P.M. The whites-only Ritz was closed on Sundays and Mondays, enabling the band to perform on two successive Sundays, September 13 and 20, at Forest Park, a venue catering to African Americans.²⁹

27. Bryant is identified as Albert’s “advance representative” in “Don Albert and Pals in West,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 25, 1931, sec. 2, p. 8; Barnes, “Hittin’ the High Notes,” *Chicago Defender*, July 25, 1931, p. 5; *Daily Oklahoman*, July 24, 1931, p. 10.

28. The *Courier*’s contest was announced in the issue of August 3, 1931, sec. 2, p. 8; Bryant’s nomination was cited in the issue of August 22, sec. 2, p. 1. The band continued to be listed as a contestant for the next three issues—August 29, September 5, and September 12—and was dropped as of September 19.

29. *Arkansas Democrat*, August 22, 1931, p. 2; Barnes, “Hittin’ the High Notes,” *Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1931, p. 5; “Don Albert and Pals Get New Contract,”

An article in the *Black Dispatch* of September 24, 1931, told of the black community's favorable response to the Ten Pals:

For the last few days, dance fans and music lovers of Oklahoma City have danced to the syncopating music of Don Albert and His Twelve Pals, and have listened with rapt attention as the strains of the music masters died away in the distance. Truly, this group of artists have captivated the capital city as never before. . . .

"The South's Greatest Dance Orchestra," the motto of this orchestra, can be truly said to cover all that is syncopation, rhythm, and novelty. To dance once to their music is to dance again.

The Ritz Ballroom, an exclusive white pleasure garden in Oklahoma City, was taken in a storm; Show Boat, a palatial palace of entertainment and splendor, praises their ability, and Forest Park, a dance city within itself, extols their worth.

Since being on the road, this orchestra has played return engagements in the principal cities of four southern states and today finds itself unable to accept all invitations extended to it all of which goes to prove its extraordinary ability.³⁰

The personnel list appended to the article reveals that the reporter miscounted: the musicians, including Albert, totaled only twelve.

It is uncertain where the band played during the summer of 1931, because local newspapers provided no coverage. At some point, it played engagements for the Majestic Theater chain in Oklahoma. There was a Majestic Theater in Tulsa, and the owner of the Showboat in Oklahoma City happened to own two clubs in Tulsa as well, Crystal City and the Louvre Ballroom, at which the band might also have performed. According to Herb Hall, the band played in Fort Smith, Arkansas, halfway between Little Rock and Oklahoma City. It may have also traveled to Baton Rouge, where, according to Annie Lou Hall, Sam Burt had been hired. Following the band's return to San Antonio, an article in the *San Antonio Register* reported that it had gone to Nashville to play "a concert engagement" at Fisk University. If true, this would have been one of the earliest concerts in the history of jazz. That the most direct route from Little Rock to Nashville goes through Memphis suggests that the band might have played in that city as well.³¹

San Antonio Register, August 14, 1931, p. 3; *Black Dispatch*, September 10, 1931, p. 5, September 17, 1931, p. 8; *Arkansas Democrat*, October 3, 1931, p. 9.

30. "Don Albert Fetes Louis Armstrong," *Black Dispatch*, September 24, 1931, p. 5.

31. Eric Townley, "San Antonio Piano Man: An Interview with Lloyd Glenn," *Storyville* 78 (August–September 1978): 222; "Don Albert and His Pals Return," *San Antonio Register*, December 4, 1931, p. 1; Brown, "Herb Hall," 174; Hall interview, 1991.

The reference in the *Black Dispatch* article to the quality of the band's "syncopating" music, so appealing to its audiences, implies that, in addition to head arrangements and commercial charts, Phil Tiller's "full, special arrangements" enabled the band to play the latest hit tunes in distinctive style. Numerous bandleaders of the time confirm that jazz and blues constituted only a portion of a dance band's repertory. Although the musicians may have preferred to play such music, there is every reason to believe that such numbers were the exception for a dance band in the 1930s, not the rule.³²

Albert indicated to Richard Allen that on dance dates the band typically played three pieces as a "set": first, a medium-tempo fox-trot, next a slow number, and finally an up-tempo "killer-diller" for those who liked to dance the Lindy Hop. Alvin Alcorn, however, recalled playing four tunes in a row. Whether three or four, few of the numbers were longer than four minutes, thus a set might last somewhere between ten and fifteen minutes. In the course of a four-hour engagement, there would be one thirty-minute intermission.³³

Because Albert discarded all of the band's music in later years, one can only speculate as to the particular songs and dance tunes that made up the book of arrangements. In different conversations, he mentioned various titles, unfortunately without connecting all of them to a particular time in the band's history. "Clarinet Marmalade," "Milneburg Joys," and "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like my Sister Kate" were part of the original repertory. Albert was particularly fond of "Roses of Picardy," a song that he had sung as a child; the band's arrangement featured him. Later newspaper accounts describe "symphonic arrangements" of "Stardust" and "Liebestraum," as well as "a commendable arrangement" of "Trees." These latter titles were associated with a sweet style like that of Guy Lombardo.³⁴

The band was always ready to cater to the taste of its local audience. Albert recalled that L. E. Buttrick, dance instructor and manager of

32. David W. Stowe discusses the musical preferences of midwestern and southeastern audiences in "Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region during the Swing Era," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (February 1992): 63-64, 67. Evidence of the need for diverse repertoires was provided by saxophonist Buster Smith, who recalled that the Blue Devils could play in any of three styles; he mentioned "sweet music" and arrangements "that had a lot of waltzes in it and some of the country music," the third component presumably consisting of jazz and blues numbers. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 67.

33. Albert interview, 1969; Alvin Alcorn, interview, March 5, 1990.

34. *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 11, 1935, sec. 2, p. 1; November 16, 1935, sec. 2, p. 6.

the Ritz Ballroom, was “a fanatic for the waltz.” Naturally, the band played a waltz during every set at Buttrick’s establishment. Both in San Antonio and in towns along the Rio Grande, the band played *canciones* and other Mexican music to appeal to Tejano audiences. Elsewhere, polkas came in handy.³⁵

The band’s “book” also included novelty numbers, often involving one or more sidemen in vaudeville-inspired routines. According to Walter Barnes, Sam Burt kept “the crowds spellbound with his eccentric style of singing” and was identified in the list of personnel published in the *Black Dispatch* as the band’s “entertainer.” Since, as Albert observed, every band had one or more novelty numbers, it is not surprising that among the band’s recordings made in November 1936, were novelty treatments of the songs “Sheik of Araby” and “On the Sunny Side of the Street.”³⁶

The Ten Pals’ six-week contract at the Ritz was scheduled to end on Friday, October 9. If, as anticipated by the report in the *Black Dispatch*, it was extended another six weeks, the band might have remained in Oklahoma City at least until November 20. An article in the *San Antonio Register* of December 4, 1931, noted that the Ten Pals had recently returned to town after completing a thirteen-week engagement at the Ritz. That would have ended on November 27. Herb Hall recalled that the return to San Antonio came rather suddenly, after a promised engagement fell through, perhaps a second extension of the Ritz contract. “We could see that things were beginning to get a little rough, so we figured we had better get back to San Antonio. . . . So Don called the people at Shadowland and the guy said, ‘Yeah, come on back.’”³⁷

Back at their home base, the Ten Pals spent five months at Shadowland. As before, they took to the airwaves, broadcasting over KMAC on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays from 7:30 to 8:00 P.M. Coverage in the *Register* confirms that the band played on at least two occasions for the black community: early Christmas Day, 1931 (the dancing began at 4:00 A.M.!), and again on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1932.³⁸

35. Albert interview, 1969; *Daily Oklahoman*, August 6, 1931, sec. C, p. 6.

36. Barnes, “Hittin’ the High Notes,” *Chicago Defender*, September 26, 1931, p. 5; Albert interview, 1977.

37. “Don Albert and His Ten Pals Return,” *San Antonio Register*, December 4, 1931, p. 1; Brown, “Herb Hall,” 174.

38. “Don Albert Is a Hit in the South,” *Chicago Defender*, June 4, 1932, p. 5; *San*

During this, the third year of the Depression, when “things were beginning to get a little rough,” the advantage of steady employment at Shadowland was obvious. San Antonio was a winter resort for northerners, who infused money into the local economy. Shadowland was itself a tourist attraction. To be its house band was quite possibly not only the most secure gig in the city, but also among the best paid.

The band was by now highly regarded in the black community. Its performance at the Easter dance created “quite a furore in musical circles,” according to the *Register* of April 1. Joining the dancers were several local musicians, including Troy Floyd, who subsequently sent a letter to the newspaper that was included in the report of the dance:

Since the public has at LAST had a treat according to advertisement in your paper in hearing Don Albert and his Ten Pals, I hereby issue a challenge to meet this bunch in a Musical Contest at any time and place so designated by them so as to let the public know and decide whether or not they have at last had a treat as advertised by them at their recent dance at the Recreation Center.

Very truly yours,
Troy Floyd

To heighten interest in a possible battle between these bands, the newspaper speculated that “Don Albert will not accept the challenge from his former ‘boss man’ with whom he came to San Antonio.”³⁹ Such contests were as much publicity stunts designed to attract large crowds (and large receipts) as they were genuine musical competitions, but to Floyd this may have meant far more than a chance to show off his band at the expense of an upstart group. By now the Floyd band had “gigged around” and “played pillar to post,” according to his banjoist, John Henry Bragg, as the economy dried up and steady work became harder and harder to find. Indeed, the band’s days were numbered; it would fold in 1933. Perhaps its leader hoped that a decisive win in this battle might once more secure engagements in San Antonio. His had, after all, been the house band at Shadowland before the Ten Pals came along.⁴⁰

The battle did not take place until June 22, 1932, which gave the *Register* plenty of time to generate interest in the contest. Two days

Antonio Register, December 18, pp. 6–7; December 25, 1931, p. 3; April 1, 1932, p. 8.

39. “Don Albert’s Dance Brings a Challenge,” *San Antonio Register*, April 1, 1932, p. 8.

40. Bragg interview.

later, the headline on its society page screamed, “Troy Floyd Victorious in Tilt with Don Albert.” The subheads ran, “Crowd Cheers Musicians as Battle Rages—Interest High—Judges Unable to Reach Decision, Unanimously Agree to Let Dancers Say.” The description that followed noted the stylish appearance of each band, the “nobby gray suits, blue ties and handkerchiefs” of the Ten Pals contrasting with the “tailored suits of black mohair, white shirts, and black ties” of Floyd’s musicians (see Fig. 12). Three judges, including one member of each band, evaluated “the arrangements, rhythm, execution, decorum, and effect of the music on the dancers,” but were unable to reach a consensus. Each band then played an additional number, after which the length of the audience’s applause determined the winner. Although the Ten Pals’ performance was greeted with “roaring applause,” Floyd’s fans demonstrated on his behalf for fully ten minutes, and so he was declared victorious. Though some of Albert’s fans commandeered the microphone to demand that the contest be extended, the decision was final. A fine time was clearly had by all and, undoubtedly, each band collected a fat pay envelope as a result. By the time the *Register* reported the news, the Ten Pals were already back on the road.⁴¹

The Second and Third Tours: Texas and Louisiana

The band that left San Antonio on July 23, 1932, en route to an engagement in Lake Charles, Louisiana, had a new member: North Little Rock native and tenor saxophonist Charles Pillars. He did not stay long; by early July he had been replaced by Wallace Mercer, formerly of T. Holder’s band.⁴²

This second tour was considerably shorter than the first—not quite two months. The band was back at Shadowland by August 19. It is known for certain to have played in only one town: Lake Charles, per-

41. “Troy Floyd Victorious in Tilt with Don Albert,” *San Antonio Register*, June 24, 1932, p. 6.

42. “Don Albert and His Ten Pals Return,” *San Antonio Register*, December 4, 1931, p. 1. Charles was the older brother of Hayes Pillars, co-leader of the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra based in St. Louis.



Figure 12 The Ten Pals, dressed to the nines.

haps at the Lake Charles Athletic Club. Even an extended engagement there would not have precluded its playing one-nighters elsewhere.

Herb Hall recalled, and newspaper coverage confirms, one occasion during this period when the entire band took off for New Orleans to hire Alvin Alcorn to be its third trumpet player. Alcorn had developed quite a reputation playing in Henry “Kid” Rena’s band, which ended a three-year contract at the Astoria Ballroom on South Rampart Street on July 10. Earl M. Wright’s July 16, 1932, “At Moontime” column in New Orleans’s black newspaper, the *Louisiana Weekly*, stated that “Don Albert’s Orchestra passed through here last week and took that young cornet wizard, Alvin Alcorn, from us. We figured someone would.” Presumably, Alcorn joined Albert after the end of Rena’s Astoria gig.⁴³

With four saxes, three trumpets, two trombones, and a four-piece rhythm section, the Ten Pals had become a thirteen-piece band with the following personnel:

Don Albert, trumpet and leader
 Hiram Harding, trumpet
 Alvin Alcorn, trumpet
 Frank Jacquet, slide trombone
 Henry Turner, tuba and valve trombone
 Herbert Hall, alto saxophone
 Louis Cottrell Jr., tenor saxophone
 Philander Tiller, alto saxophone and arranger
 Wallace Mercer, tenor saxophone
 Al Freeman Jr., piano and arranger
 Jimmy Johnson, string bass
 Albert “Fats” Martin, drums
 Sam Burt, vocalist

The only problem with having such a large band was that its name no longer fit. Albert’s temporary solution was to refer to it as “The Ten Pals—All Twelve of Them.”

43. Brown, “Herb Hall,” 184; Earl M. Wright, “At Moontime,” *Louisiana Weekly*, July 16, 1932, p. 4.

“Back in Town and on the Job” is how the *Register* of August 19, headlined its story reporting the return of Albert’s band to Shadowland, where it remained until the end of the year. It was a period of steady work at the club, although undocumented performances in or around San Antonio surely took place on occasions when it was closed.

During the fall, Albert could assess the extent of the band’s reputation in the results of two band popularity contests, one in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the other in the *San Antonio Register*. The results of the first of these revealed the limited extent of the band’s reputation—not surprising after only two tours in the Southwest. The second, obviously a local competition, provides some measure of the following Albert had developed in his adopted hometown. More significant, perhaps, is that it also indicates how weak the support was for the Troy Floyd band.

The *Courier*’s contest was launched on September 3 in an article by its theatrical editor, Floyd G. Snelson, announcing the impending start of the “Most Popular Orchestra Contest.” The rules were simple: write a letter of 200 words or fewer in support of a favorite band, and it would receive ten votes. Buy an annual subscription at the reduced rate of two dollars (down from three), and it would receive one hundred votes. The contest began on September 15, 1932, and was to end on December 1. Two days after the official start of the contest, Snelson’s report began as follows:

Help! Help! I am swamped with letters. A deluge of mail from orchestra fans all over the country is piled high on my desk. . . . The phone rings monotonously. . . . I am besieged with queries. . . . but, how glad, gloriously glad!

After another paragraph of equally heated prose about the importance of this contest to the future career of the lucky winner, Snelson continued:

Who got the first vote? Well, you may be surprised, but the very first vote was from [*sic*] a new orchestra, that is, new to this section. It is Don Albert and His Ten Pals, hailed as the “South’s Greatest Dance Orchestra.” There are 14 stellar musicians, masters of the art of syncopation, in Don Albert’s aggregation, and they have enjoyed a three years’ run at the famous white nite club, Shadowland, San Antonio, Texas. They are heard over KMAC every night from 12 to 12:30.

“I cast my vote for Don Albert,” writes the enthusiastic Texan. “He and his band really play jazz.”⁴⁴

Whoever cast that first vote (Albert himself?) took advantage of the reduced subscription rate as well; when the first report of the vote totals appeared in the October 1 issue, the Ten Pals had one hundred votes. At that point, Duke Ellington (who had received the second vote as of September 17) was leading with four hundred.

Albert’s vote total did not change between October 1 and 15. The *Courier’s* October 22 edition reported that it had climbed to 310, but by then Ellington’s was 6,790. As of the twenty ninth, the Ten Pals had 550 votes. The next week, Snelson eliminated all contestants having fewer than three thousand votes including Albert’s band. Ellington, back in first place after challenges by Cab Calloway and Noble Sissle, had by then accumulated 15,500. Albert’s total of 550 votes was disappointingly small, but it could have been worse. Alphonso Trent ultimately received only two hundred votes, and Floyd was not even nominated.⁴⁵

The popularity of the *Courier’s* contest encouraged the *Register* to follow suit, beginning in its issue of December 16 and continuing into March 1933. In this contest, one voted by purchasing a subscription. A year’s subscription, costing \$3.00, allowed an individual to cast two thousand votes for a particular band. The shorter the subscription, the fewer the votes: six months bought one thousand votes; three months, five hundred. To add interest, the paper began by allotting twelve Texas bands—Albert’s, Floyd’s, and Trent’s among them—one thousand votes each.⁴⁶

The Ten Pals eventually won this contest. Whatever its other merits, the competition revealed that a new generation of bands was on the ascendancy in Texas. Neither Trent nor Floyd were ever contenders. Albert’s rivals were Boots [Douglas] and His Buddies, Jack

44. Floyd G. Snelson, “‘Pile Up Votes’-‘Start Your Jazz’—Slogans of Contest,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 17, 1932, sec. 2, p. 1.

45. Snelson, “Ellington and Sissle ‘On Wing’ Again in Contest,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 1, 1932; “Cab Calloway Spurts to Cut ‘Duke’s’ Lead in Contest,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 8, 1932; “Duke, Cab, Sissle Are 1–2–3 as Battle of Bands Gets Hot,” October 15, 1932; “Leaders in Band Race Grip Places; Moten Takes Spurt,” October 22, 1932; “Sissle Sweeps into Lead as Votes Pour In,” October 29, 1932; “Bennie Moten Takes Spurt,” November 5, 1932. (In all cases the column appears in sec. 2, p. 1.)

46. “All Texas Dance Orchestra Popularity Contest Opens,” *San Antonio Register*, December 16, 1932, p. 6.

Ransome's Rhythm Boys, and (briefly) Wardell's Eleven Black Diamonds. The fact that the Ten Pals received 16,500 votes, accounting for only thirty-one new three-month subscribers, does not, however, indicate a groundswell of support.⁴⁷

In its report on the progress of the competition on December 30 1932, the *Register* noted that "Don Albert, who was leading last week. . . has left town for an indefinite stay." Eventually, the band headed to New Orleans, where it played at the Pelican Gardens at least twice between February 11 and March 4, 1933, and at the San Jacinto Club at least once. A front-page story by *Louisiana Weekly* reporter Earl M. Wright, headlined "Don Albert's 14-Piece Orchestra Captivates Three Dance Audiences," sang the band's praises, noting that

Don and his gang played the Pelican Saturday and Sunday [February 11 and 12, 1934] and the San Jacinto Club Monday nights and enthusiastic crowds hailed them as one of the best bands to strut through here, not because they are for the most part Orleanians but because their arrangements and their manipulation of classical, jazz, and every other type of number they delt [*sic*] with were so different and pleasing.

Not only did the band have the opportunity to please those who attended its performances, it also broadcast over New Orleans radio station WWL. The engagements were so successful that A. T. Mitchell, who had hired the band, stated that he planned to book it again. Although not identifying any locations, Wright also noted that "the band will play nearby towns before returning to the city." The Ten Pals came back to the Pelican on February 16 for what was advertised as "positively the last local appearance by the band" before its return to Texas.⁴⁸

Jones Hall Jr. reported in the *San Antonio Register* of March 17 that Albert's musicians had "recently returned from a tour that carried them through the major cities in three states. Crowds rushed at every occasion to hear the sweet strains that they produced, so pleas-

47. The course of the popularity contest was covered in the *Register* on December 23 and 30, 1932, and January 6, 13, 20, February 3, 10, 17, March 3, 10, 17, 1933.

48. "Jack Ransom Creeps Up to Snatch Lead in Race," *San Antonio Register*, December 30, 1932, p. 6; *Louisiana Weekly*, February 4, 1933, p. 3; February 11, p. 3, (this article also announced the WWL broadcasts); Earl M. Wright, "Don Albert's 14-Piece Orchestra Captivates Three Dance Audiences," *Louisiana Weekly*, February 18, 1933, p. 1; February 25, p. 3.

ing to the ear.” A notice in the *Register* of March 10 that “Don Albert and his great swing orchestra played the other night” somewhere in San Antonio’s black community indicates that this tour lasted not quite three months.⁴⁹

A Change of Name

During this time, the band was in the process of renaming itself. Clearly, “Don Albert and His Ten Pals” no longer fit, and although the phrase “all fourteen of them” might have been a witty means of accounting for the actual size of the band, no doubt it was becoming a joke repeated too often. Hall’s March 17 column contained a hint that the process was underway, stating that “for the past week music lovers have been given their share of the best music one should desire by Don Albert and His Ten Pals styled as *America’s greatest swing band*” (italics added). That phrase would soon become part of the band’s cognomen. Fixing on a new name, and then gaining acceptance of it in the press and public, apparently took some time.

The Chicago Defender’s new chronicler of dance bands, Jack Ellis, noted on June 24 that “Don Albert and orchestra, commonly referred to as ‘America’s greatest swing band,’ are appearing at the Shadowland night club.” Albert would always claim that he was the first to identify the style of music that his band played as “swing.” The first advertisement in which the band was identified as something other than “Don Albert and His Ten Pals” appeared on September 4, 1933, in Little Rock’s *Arkansas Democrat*. It informed readers that “Don Albert and His Music” were ending a two-night engagement at the Rialto Theater in North Little Rock that evening. That the band’s new name was still not fixed was reflected in an advertisement three days later, announcing that “Don Albert and His Orchestra, America’s Greatest Swing Band” would be playing at the Rainbow Garden.”⁵⁰

49. “Don Albert and His Ten Pals Greater Than Ever, Says Hall,” *San Antonio Register*, March 17, 1932, p. 3; “On the Boulevard,” *San Antonio Register*, March 10, 1932, p. 4.

50. Jack Ellis, “The Orchestras,” *Chicago Defender*, June 24, 1933, p. 5; *Arkansas Democrat*, September 4, 1933, p. 7; September 6, p. 6; Albert interview, 1977.

During the spring of 1933, while still working at Shadowland, the band made several run-outs to play special dates. On March 20, it performed for a dance sponsored by the Smart Set Social Club of Seguin. On April 1, the band traveled to Austin for the Junior-Senior Prom sponsored by the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. "Beautifully gowned women and smartly dressed men swayed to the rhythmic strains of Texas' most popular swing band." On Easter Monday, April 17, it provided music for the year's most important social event for black San Antonians: the Spring Dance, sponsored by the junior chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, held in the city's principal public venue for African Americans, the Colored Library Auditorium. And on May 20, the band performed for the Junior-Senior Prom at Prairie View College, having been chosen by the junior class from a list of "several outstanding orchestras of the Southwest."⁵¹

In the almost four years since the founding of the band, Albert had accomplished a great deal. He had kept it going during the worst of the Depression, had established it as the leading black band in San Antonio, and had toured successfully in the south-central United States. Beginning in September 1933, his ambitions and those of his sidemen would take them beyond the boundaries of the Southwest in search of engagements in other territories and also in search of a reputation to match their claim to being "America's Greatest Swing Band."

51. *San Antonio Register*, March 17, 1933, p. 6; April 7, pp. 3, 6; April 14, p. 1; April 17, p. 6; May 19, p. 1.