Dodds, Johnny

(b. April 12, 1892, New Orleans, La., U.S.--d. Aug. 8, 1940, Chicago, Ill.), African-American musician noted as one of the most lyrically expressive of jazz clarinetists.

Dodds grew up in the musically stimulating environment of New Orleans in the early years of jazz and began playing clarinet at age 17. He played in Fate Marable's riverboat bands (1917) before becoming an integral part of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (1920-24), one of the most closely unified of all jazz ensembles. He provided counterpoint to the melodic leads of cornetists Oliver and Louis Armstrong.

Dodds then led bands in Chicago and recorded prolifically as a leader, as an accompanist to blues performers, and as a sideman in some of the era's major jazz works, including Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, the climax development of the New Orleans style, and Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recording groups of the late 1920s, including some of the first post-New Orleans style masterpieces. He worked often with his brother, drummer Baby Dodds, but made few recordings after 1930.

Initially a sensitive, fluent ensemble improviser, Dodds became a valued soloist as well. His tone was distinctive, with a full, reedy lower (chalumeau) register and a variety of rich sonorities in the upper register; he featured a wide, flat vibrato that lent drama to his musical lines. He was a fertile creator of diatonic melodies coloured with blues inflections and enhanced by an urgent attack, and his blues improvising is especially highly regarded.

Among his outstanding recordings are "Perdido Street Blues" and "Too Tight Blues" with the New Orleans Wanderers; "Wolverine Blues" with the Jelly Roll Morton trio; and a series of 1928-29 Victor recordings that he led, including "Heah' Me Talkin'," "Too Tight," and "My Little Isabel."

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.**