

Hogan Jazz Archive awarded grant to digitize recordings of first African American DJ in New Orleans

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Vernon Winslow and Mrs. Naomi Borikins. Representative of the importance placed by Jax on the Negro market are the positions held by these two. Vernon Winslow doubles in radio and sales work in New Orleans and the surrounding area. Mrs. Borikin does public relations work, and has been associated with the brewery for eleven years.

Vernon Winslow, left, and Naomi Borikins, right, pictured in December 1951. (Photo provided by Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Louisiana Research Collection)

The Hogan Jazz Archive of the Howard Tilton Memorial Library was awarded a \$11,500 grant from the GRAMMY Museum Grant Program to digitize and preserve recordings from Vernon Winslow, the first African American disc jockey in New Orleans.

The GRAMMY Museum Grant Program provides funding to organizations and individuals to support the archiving and preservation of recordings for future generations and research projects related to impact of music. The Hogan Jazz Archive was one of 15 recipients this year.

Vernon Winslow (1911-1993) is best remembered for his pioneering work as “Dr. Daddy-O,” the first African American disc jockey in New Orleans. After earning a fine arts degree from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago in 1936, Winslow relocated to New Orleans, where he took a position as an art professor at Dillard University. His interest in radio eventually led to his own program on station WWEZ. His show, “Jivin’ with Jax,” became the first full-length radio show to feature a black DJ and that catered specifically to the African American audience in New Orleans. Winslow’s hip, smooth, and erudite style set him apart from his competitors, establishing him as the preeminent DJ of the time. His show led to the breakdown of segregation in New Orleans radio, and his sound influenced generations of local radio DJs. He later wrote newspaper columns, hosted a gospel radio show, and continued to teach at Dillard. Winslow earned his master’s degree in education from Tulane in 1969.

The recordings to be digitized include Winslow’s personalized advertisements and endorsements for New Orleans bars, music clubs, and the fabled J&M Recording Studio; his conversations with jazz great Duke Ellington, traditional jazz ambassador Avery “Kid” Howard, and baseball stars Roy Campanella and Don Newcombe as well as rhythm & blues recording artists Roy Brown, Savannah Churchill, Ivory Joe Hunter, Big Maceo Merriweather, Roosevelt Sykes, Little Esther Phillips, and Louis Jordan, all promoting their latest hits; commercially unreleased material by New Orleans rhythm & blues icon Dave Bartholomew; and a local gospel warhorse quartet, the Golden Chain Jubileers. Together, these recordings represent the binding ingredients that define the sound of “Black Radio” during its earliest days in New Orleans. The collection is a treasure trove for anyone with interest in New Orleans music history and culture, its broader influence on American music, desegregation of the airwaves, and the black experience in the South during the Jim Crow era.