Topsy Durham Pays Tribute to Her Legendary Father Eddie Durham

# [transcript]

hi my name is ginger Broderick and I'm

the host of the ginger New York TV show

we're here at the Manhattan neighborhood

network on West 59th Street in Manhattan

thank you for joining in with us this is

a previously taped show because my guest

is very busy and world traveling so we

got her in a little bit earlier during

the summertime in order to talk about

her life her father the late Eddie

Durham and we want to talk about his

legacy

so please welcome Topsy Dharma hey thank

you very much for coming in today

yes your schedule I think that's more of

the issue yeah but thank you so much for

coming in today you know you're a

musical family you know generations of

it you have a famous father and it's

really nice that we can play pay tribute

to him thank you because of all the work

that he's done from the early in the

ninth to 1930s correct

so you're any terms daughter yes he was

born in San Marcos Texas in 1906 but one

has to remember it's the age of the

mother not the age of the father huh so

yes he would be over a hundred years old

now but and that would make you about 80

and I don't think you'll understand

San Marcos that they are building a park

in his honor

and wonderful writing on the block where

he was born Oh wonderful it's actually

Martin Luther King jr. Boulevard

wonderful in the Dunbar area of San

Marcos Texas and how large is this town

of San Marcos it's small the largest

population there are the students at

Texas State University I have about

40,000 students okay and

it's small town but it's in the middle

of Austin and San Antonio okay actually

land in either airport and then drive to

San Marcos and what is about an hour so

it's got an hour each way yeah wonderful

little more from Sam San Antonio so he

was born in the early 1900s right and he

died in 1987 in New York okay and so I

wanted to cover today some things that

not necessarily know found on the

internet because the research you can do

on Durham jazz comm which is a website

that I started about 15 years ago and I

just add information and add information

for researchers students professors and

for myself as well when I have to do

interviews because you know the memory

it's not what it used to be and it's a

lot to go over it's a lot to remember my

father was not just a musician or

composer you know he was also an

arranger he was a trombonist guitar is

he also did choreography for the bands

when they were doing the flag-waving

with the whole interesting that's that's

a lot of my father's work and he

mentored some old women's bands in the

1940s during world war ii and he also

mentored Charlie Christian you know who

was whose Harold has the first electric

guitars but actually he my dad was the

first electric guitars the first to

record on electric guitar mm-hmm about

what year was that that was in 1935 on a

song called hitting the bottle which he

did not write with the Jimi lunch months

for an orchestra mm-hmm that was the I'm

sorry that was the amplified guitar

recording the electric guitar recordings

were in 1938 on a session that was

produced by John Hammond senior for my

father to showcase the electric guitar

some of the first solos are on there but

it's the first recordings of electric

guitar as well and that the the session

was originally called Eddie Durham and

his bass for and they did four or five

recordings songs and it didn't sell and

the record company also got sold and so

the new label says well we can't put it

out with just four or five songs so they

brought in Lester Young and it lost

Lester Young and it became the Kansas

City five-o interesting I went from the

Eddie Durman his base for Kansas City

five with Lester young and it was it's

now famous and it's known as the Lester

young sessions but if you read the liner

notes you'll see that there are four or

five songs on the I think it's four

songs but that Lester is not on and that

have an earlier date earlier that year

and then Lester was added later in the

year I think I have a picture of the

so I think so

Kansas City sessions so he was the first

to record on an amplified guitar on

contraptions that he made himself and

then he was the first to record on an

electric guitar and he also was the

first to record single line solos which

he did with Benny Mullins Orchestra in

early 1930s I guess that was around 9 32

33 maybe might have been earlier than

that I'm sorry

that's a calm also recordings he didn't

write new vine Street Blues Spanish

stomp and rumba negro I think it's

called

so there was you know there's a lot of

firsts for him how did he get involved

with music okay that's an interesting

question not that I mean to sidetracked

you know it's it's good that you asked

me that because his eldest brother Joe

jr. I don't know what yeah he was born

but he was born before 1900 he was

musical director for Teddy Roosevelt's

homecoming cavalry band the Rough Riders

in Texas where he loved his brother

learned to read and write read and

notate music there he taught all of his

siblings to do the same when he came

back he taught them all how to play all

the instruments they learned my dad's

father was a fiddler and he played the

square dances in Texas so my father said

that his father was a three things he

was a fiddler he was a Bronco and he was

a great whiskey drinker so you know he

was a party man sounds very Texan yeah

the funny thing is that the kids my

father and his siblings they would they

would somehow catch these rattlesnakes

and take this rattles off of them and

put them in the fiddle and it would

amplify a little good so so this

amplification was something that my

father was seem to be obsessed with from

you know really young age and I'm going

to assume that was definitely his

father's idea and so he learned music

from his brother but they used to attend

the square dances with their father so I

guess this is where his oldest brother

learned you know then you got an

appreciation for music then they as they

got a little older they joined the

circuses Texas had a gigantic circus

called the Doug Morgan's traveling

circus and he played banjo at the time

but he learned banjo and and trombone at

the same time from his brother and they

had a family band called to Durham

Brothers Orchestra they joined the

circuses the minstrels and that's how he

learned to arrange for the brass bands

eventually they went to a bigger band

called the 101 wild ranch circus which

was bigger than Ringling Brothers and

Barnum and Bailey and as a matter of

fact the 101 ranch circus brought a

lawsuit against the merger of Ringling

Brothers and Barnum & Bailey because

they said you know if they let them

merge then they would try to corner the

market and of course obviously they lost

that lawsuit but this circus they owned

a ranch of you know over a thousand

acres and the performers were able to

stay there and live there if they wanted

it was really pretty amazing but that's

all on the website you can read about do

you know what town that the this it was

in Oklahoma and so from there he learned

to arrange brass large brass and he knew

read music knew how to write music this

was very unusual for an african-american

in those days he learned how to he

learned six point harmony wasn't the

main thing was even known as 6 point

harmony but in the circus it was you

know so from there he went to the the

bluedevils

orchestra oak oklahoma Blue Devils

Orchestra and from the Oklahoma Blue

Devils to Ben motors Orchestra and then

and when he came into Benny Moulton's

Orchestra it was a really good band but

he came in and he changed the whole

musical structure of that band and

started you know brought them into a

modern the modern well you can't call it

model because it didn't exist at the

time but he kind of brought them into a

jazz modern age where they would become

more swing a bull and what about what

age was he about at this time well he

was in the circus maybe at 12 13 oh gee

yeah and he only spoke Spanish because

his the roots where they lived in Texas

with it he only spoke Spanish he went on

tour on the tour bus with it had to be

Benny Mountains Orchestra and one of the

trumpet players was an English teacher

21 boss so a lot of his earlier

compositions have spanish names like

rumba negro has the name spanish style

but it was in Spanish it was written in

Spanish interesting yeah

and he wrote a famous tune called Topsy

yeah he wrote taxi for the bass Count

Basie Orchestra did it first in 1938

made it famous and then cozy cold we

released it in 1958 as a the first song

as a drum solo major that's a major solo

song and then it was used again 1970s in

star wars cantina scene but the

creatures playing

and now is Topsy your real name Topsy is

no follow one of me named Topsy my

mother says no she says when you get the

royalties for Thompson you can change

her name wonderful very distinctive and

it's a secret code yeah I guess I

shouldn't say that but it's funny

because when I meet older people and I

say Topsy you know they have a reaction

you know to some other references top

cement in their day besides the song and

you know and then of course jazz

aficionado say Oh Topsy that was the

song you know mm-hmm so and remember my

name always say Topsy not turvy that's

great

I love to hear about the history of

names right yes so your dad was a

youngster right you know 12 15 years old

and I guess the circus was a way for

people to travel around the country too

right yeah and through the work of the

circus that's how he learned so much

music in the English language wonderful

and the circus was a way for black

musicians and white musicians to mingle

you know even though the bands were

separate it wasn't like okay you went on

the road with good Miller and they don't

allow black musicians in this band at

this period you know the circus was a

little looser because it's a circus and

you know like I said they could all stay

on the ranch and and so after I was they

with all they would mingle and they

would go to the clubs and my father

would write stuff for them and they

would just they would play it and they

would charge at the door and you know

and that's how he learned to write isn't

that something yeah so eventually when

he was around 19 he was sent to an

accelerated program for for African

Americans in Chicago which I understand

Coleman Hawkins went to a few years

later and they were teaching harmonies

there and so you know he came in and he

didn't finish the program because he

pretty much knew as much as they did

and you know he says well I really know

six part harmony already you know it was

so you know he was very advanced at a

very young age it's wonderfully music

education wasn't very much part of my

family life and it created such a hunger

for it for me so I enjoy hearing all

these stories and certainly patronizing

and supporting live artists and life

music right so it's great to have you

here learning about the history of jazz

right so then after this Chicago stint

how did he did he stay there or did he

move here to New York area not not right

away I mean he went to various different

places with different bands because it

was in a Jimmie Lunceford band for I

don't think he stayed with any band more

than two years because he was hired to

arrange for the band to rehearse the

brass section sometimes - right he

always wrote for every band he was with

and so and he had some issues with the

Union where I don't know what the story

was I listened to some of my father's

stories and you know it doesn't make

sense to me because it doesn't happen

nowadays I mean not one not the way it

did back then so he was he moved around

a bit he was with you know Count Basie's

Orchestra he was with already Shore for

a brief minute he was with cab calloway

for a couple of weeks and then he was

with Glenn Miller for a little while he

he arranged in the mood for Glenn Miller

now Glenn Miller didn't write in the

mood and it was a song that had been

around forever it was never famous but

there might the arrangement my father

put on it made this song famous

wonderful Orchestra you know that hide

him he wrote slip on jars Glenn Miller

he moved around a lot he worked for

Willie Bryant then in the 1940s he was

in Chicago with Sarah McClure law and

the sinkovitz where they used to

he was her musical director he wasn't in

the band because a band was all women's

always Sarah's bands were always over in

bands and they were always combos and

because of you we were able to interview

Sarah mclaurel recently and she was just

a pleasure to have here the thing I

wanted to tell you they rehearsed at a

place called Wally's paradise in Chicago

which is still there and it was you know

that's a college they had a college

somewhere nearby

it was college town with whichever town

they were in in Chicago and Quincy Jones

used to come in as a student and acts to

sit in with the band I don't know if Sam

told you that no and it didn't do it on

her I said so you Quincy Jones mentor

remember early influences you know so he

moved around a lot I'm not exactly sure

when he first came to New York but I

know that he met my mother in New York

and I was born in 1958 so I you know I'm

sure he was here before that but he's

been in New York since you know until he

died from you know in 1987 and when he

married my mother they had five children

he stopped touring and he stayed home

and you know so he was an older man by

that point who was in his fit he was in

his early 50s and he ran a club out on

Long Island called dick shoots and there

was another club cook and he had a

liquor license and so he would run the

club and on the island and so he was

home you know every night and he was

writing and I remember going to base his

house and you know and him coming to our

house and you know Joe Jones and all

those guys hanging out put my brother

knows more of that because he's a guitar

player you know he mixed more I yes and

then after

was about 16 or 17 he's my father during

the Harlem blues and jazz band and he

was with them for 10 or 12 years and

until he died and they traveled they

start traveling around the world again

so how exciting yeah that's really

wonderful and in how is it that the

hometown contacted you for the park

well are you active yes three the

calaboose African American Museum which

is across the street from where my

father was born which is a lot now the

woman Johnny Olmsted she's passed away

since she contacted me and says we want

to do an exhibit you know and your dad

this is his hometown I'm the only black

museum in town I said fine I sent her

some artifacts and things for the museum

and some photos and whatnot and then she

told me that she had discovered that the

lot across that the house at the time

there was a house there Shack or

something there was where my father was

born and she was curious and this was

why she was content it wasn't

interesting sauce is okay so she said

we're doing a tribute to him on his

birthday if you want to come down so

that the first shot he can go and then

the second year like a music festival

music outdoor music festival so within

the year I just want you to watch your

hands always the mic within the year

they established that he dome day and

wonderful 19 wonderful it didn't that's

his birthday so I not only hosted it but

I contacted Sam Ash and Paul ash was

gracious enough to sponsor part of it so

I was able to bring my brother's band

down top greens

and he performed and I had rattlesnake

Annie who perform at my father as well

and and the Holland blues and jazz bein

and she also recorded I don't want to

set the world on fire in a country genre

and it went to the top of the charts and

I read I remembered her name only from

files I had looked at and I thought

rattlesnake any I'll call her because

she did I don't want set the world on

fire wonderful she was just as wonderful

as ever and then I brought the Harlem

blues and jazz band as well so the hope

the whole festival in 2005 5 2004 was

sponsored by Sam Ash then in 2005

because my dad has text in Mexican Tex

Mex roots I understand we had old

Spanish jazz bands Latin jazz Oh

interesting the Hispanic cultural center

of Texas sponsored that year then 2006

was my father's centennial year because

he was born in 1906 so Sam Ash partially

sponsored again and they released the

editor signature Centennial guitar and

I've you know you have that photo I

think and a view and so that was really

a milestone because finally someone had

acknowledged that editor and was the

pioneer of electric guitar pioneer of

the amplified guitar Tata phone and you

know commemorated it with this release

I've heard your husband play that guitar

yes it's really amazing yeah Michael

Powers is my husband and he

they released 10,000 of them I don't

believe there are any left you have to

get them used on eBay or something like

that but in the F hole which is the hole

it's my signature and my brother's

signature so it will know if you have an

authentic 100 yes it really is a little

bit of trivia but when Miss Olmstead

passed away a couple of years ago which

was very very traumatic for me we became

very close she was like a stepmother to

me like sara is Texas State University

offered to take over the whole program

and the project and that was great

because they have the funds and you know

to do that and the wherewithal to raise

the funds whereas Johnny and I was

struggling to come up with sponsors and

money every year and so they produced it

Texas State University produced an 18

minute short documentary on my day they

came up here and I interviewed Lauren

Schaumburg and Dan Morgenstern from

Rutgers University runs the Institute of

Jazz Studies at Rutgers and they put it

it's on the website as well you can

click it and see the 18 minutes and then

they proclamation' else they do a lot

that town for my dad but I do attribute

a lot of that to the fact that it's a

small town it's easy to get things done

you know in New York it's so much red

tape to do anything to get anything done

I mean sometimes it happens as you know

you know you have to be very persistent

right you do exactly but we did have a

week-long Eddy derm Jazz Festival at

Dizzy's coca-cola and Jazz at Lincoln

Center which went in and Phil shab put

it you know their power behind to make

it happen which was great that was in

2006 as well and you know I working now

with the Texas musicians music

and the American jazz museum as well to

get some artifacts - you know whoever

wants and I have tons of stuff oh that's

really exciting when I was in college I

studied accounting and I took extra

classes for as electives and one was the

history of jazz okay yeah and one of our

assignments was to go to a jazz club and

write it up you know the program and I

went to Blue Note Chess Club and it was

physically Dizzy Gillespie was all I

knew I knew of them through the studies

and he I thought he would be an

interesting musician to see and I just

was overwhelmed with the performance and

I'm so grateful for that class because

it just opened up a whole new world to

me right you know and I still enjoy

going to blue know jazz and even for

some contemporary artists that I can

support it I have a Dizzy Gillespie

story uh-huh my father wrote a song

called wham reebok boom bam and it's a

real catchy swing dance song Wham

Reba boom bang I can swing in I can jam

when I am but then there's a part where

it goes that didn't that didn't and my

father said that dizzy that saw peanuts

salt peanuts did he came to him and

asked him about using that riff

you know for salt peanuts salt peanuts

now my father song it doesn't say

anything it's just a riff and my father

said to him oh that's nothing you know

every songs based on another song so you

got it you know that my father tells me

later years he says yeah well you know I

got that from another song

that's why I told him every spokes based

on another song that's great that's

wonderful

Dizzy's daughter lives in the tri-state

area yeah yeah I've seen her in

performances she's rearranged some of

her father's songs that's fun yeah

that's great

cab cab calloway grandson I believe

plays trumpet and leads his band as well

yes but the Harlem Renaissance Orchestra

is going to be performing this summer at

midsummer night swing and think it's sin

and they always do a couple of my

father's sounds Topsy you know that type

of thing so I want to mention some of

the awards my father has been inducted

into the National Academy of Recording

Arts and Sciences

Narus Hall of Fame for his arrangement

of in the mood and he received the

Kansas City Jazz heritage proclamation

from the Kansas City Jazz Commission he

was the 1986 honoree at Harlem week

along with Ella Fitzgerald and Dexter

Gordon I already mentioned that they've

proclamation at a during day and in San

Marcos and that they are planning to

open a park and I'm hoping to have a

gift shop there oh you know where people

can come in and I can have film running

24 hours oh you know the opening hours

where they can see you know the Texas

State footage and my own footage because

I interviewed al grey and Illinois

Jacquet and Phil shad and Sara McClure

and Collin Raye and

and these are a lot of the jazz

musicians during the 40's yes Benny

Powell and Al Gray are you know Trumbull

late trombone players top of the glass

and do you have an idea when this park

will open well they're they've

commissioned the construction to begin

this year so I'd say by next next spring

you