



Rhythm Is Our Business: Jimmie Lunceford and the Harlem Express (Jazz Perspectives)

Eddy Determeyer

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In the 1930s, swing music reigned, and the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra was the hottest and hippest attraction on the black dance circuits. Known for its impeccable appearance and infectious rhythms, Lunceford's group was able to out-swing and outdraw any band. For ten consecutive years, they were the best-loved attraction at Harlem's famed Apollo Theater. The group's hit recordings sold in the hundreds of thousands, and Jimmie Lunceford's band rivaled Ellington's for popularity in the African American community.

Jimmie Lunceford was also an innovator, elevating big-band showmanship to an art and introducing such novel instruments as the electric guitar and bass. The band's arrangements, written by Sy Oliver, Edwin Wilcox, Gerald Wilson, Billy Moore, Jr., and Tadd Dameron, were daring and forward looking, influencing generations of big-band writers.

Rhythm Is Our Business traces the development of the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra from its infant days as a high school band in Memphis to its record-breaking tours across the United States, Canada, and Europe. The book also unveils Lunceford's romantic yet ill-fated involvement with Yolande Du Bois, daughter of famous writer and opinion leader W.E.B. Du Bois. And by reconstructing Lunceford's last day, the book offers a glimpse into the mysteries surrounding the leader's untimely death. This is essential reading for anyone interested in the history and legacy of swing.

Eddy Determeyer has been a freelance music journalist for more than three decades. In 1984 Determeyer wrote a seven-part series on Jimmie Lunceford for the Dutch magazine *Jazz Nu*. Determeyer has written thousands of articles on music for a variety of Dutch publications and is the author of several books. He currently produces the *Holiday for Hipsters* radio show for Dutch station Concertzender.

Cover image: Lunceford brass section, ca. late 1936. Left to right: Paul Webster, Eddie Durham, Sy Oliver, Elmer Crumbley, Eddie Tompkins, Russell Bowles. (Bertil Lyttkens Collection)

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