

Voice 1: We've all seen that classic movie shot. A sultry singer gets up on stage at the jazz club...

Voice 2: The sound of a saxophone like a breeze in the background. The crowd goes wild, everybody's jammin' a long...

Voice 1: And this very thing happened in Seattle, in the Central District. Ernestine Anderson, Seattle's very own jazz singer...

Voice 2: Crooned the blues all night long. Except, this time...

Voice 1: She rushed home late and woke up early to get to school the next day.

Voice 2: Ernestine Anderson wasn't just Seattle's own jazz singer. She was Seattle's own *teen* jazz singer.

*(theme music plays)*

Voice A: Seattle is—

Voice B: Well, we don't use umbrellas.

Voice C: Coffee.

Voice A: Computers?

Voice C: It's a city with a needle.

Voice B: Home to sasquatch.

Voice D: Home to the Museum of History and Industry.

Voice B: Innovation.

Voice C: Rain.

Voice A: A story.

Voice D: A history.

*(music fades out underneath)*

Voice 1: My name's Atul.

Voice 2: and I'm TK. We're Youth Advisors at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle—

ATUL: And this is Rainy Day History, pre-recorded at MOHAI. In this first season, we're exploring inclusion, exclusion, objects, people, and how the Seattle we know now - the questions we grapple with now about what it means to be a Seattleite—

TK: Are all part of a bigger story. Enjoy the show...whether it's raining outside, or not.

*(sound of rain fades in and out)*

Atul: So, TK, what's our topic for today?

TK: Well, today, we're going to be talking about music, changing tunes, and changing tides, in Seattle's Central District. There's an object in MOHAI's collection that can help us tell that story. It's an album record titled *Hot Cargo*, the first full-length commercial album Ernestine Anderson ever recorded.

Atul: Who'd Ernestine Anderson?

TK: Ernestine Anderson, the jazz singer? Voice described by Quincy Jones as "honey at dusk"?

Atul: ... no.

TK: God, you're hopeless. Well, when she started singing in Seattle's jazz clubs, she was *still a student* at Garfield High School! Her family moved to Seattle in 1944 in search of wartime work and a quieter life to help keep Ernestine's schoolwork on track. She'd already started performing regularly (a little too regularly) back in Houston.

Atul: I guess Seattle can be pretty quiet. But didn't the city have a pretty active jazz nightlife scene at the time? MOHAI just had an exhibit about that last year, called *Seattle on the Spot*. It featured photographs by a man named Al Smith who documented life in the Central District and the jazz clubs around Jackson Street.

TK: Yeah... I don't think it was something they were expecting. 'Cause you're right - the Jackson Street jazz scene at the time was a lot of things, but quiet wasn't one of them. It was particularly lively during WWII, when Anderson's family arrived.

Atul: Thousands of soldiers and wartime construction workers, many of whom who were African American came to the city at this time. Many saw the Pacific Northwest as a land of opportunity and freedom, but they still faced discrimination and prejudice upon arrival. Because of exclusionary housing practices such as redlining, many ended up living in and around the Central District.

TK: Woah, hold up. What's redlining? Atul, can you give us a quick overview? You're great at that.

Atul: Aw, thanks TK. Well... it's complicated and confusing. Redlining was part of a larger set of institutional discriminatory practices that banks, real estate companies, neighborhood associations, and the federal government all participated in to keep racial minorities out of white neighborhoods. Redlining specifically refers to refusing loans or insurance to people who lived in certain areas of the city. The term comes from maps federal and private insurers would use to designate the risk level of lending to people in certain neighborhoods. So-called high-risk areas were colored in red on these maps.

TK: And let me guess, race had something to do with how these lines were being drawn.

Atul: Oh yeah, big time. People who lived there were usually racial minorities. Policies such as these made borrowing money, owning a house, or running a business difficult for people of color. Which made it even more difficult for neighborhoods to attract families who could afford to purchase homes, and increased segregation. White people who did have access to these loans were able to buy their houses in different areas.

TK: Okay, wow. That spiraled out of quick overview territory. But I guess that's to be expected. Thanks, Atul.

Okay, so these people living in and around the Central District (in large part because they were unable to get housing elsewhere), they were forging community together during all of this growth. And after work, they would head to the night clubs to hear sets by talented local musicians or some of the hottest nationally known players stopping by while on tour.

Atul: So...why wasn't Ernestine's family aware of this?

TK: Well, one reason may be because it was under-publicized. The mainstream media largely ignored the scene, instead printing review after review of chamber music concerts. Societal views of race and class rendered the activities of local African American jazz musicians largely invisible to most of the city.

Atul: Which is why the work of people from the Central District community documenting their own lives and history has been so important, like the photographs of Al Smith!

Atul: You know, when I think of jazz history, I think of places like New Orleans or New York, not Seattle.

TK: Yeah. Compared to those places, Seattle's role and impact is much smaller, but some great names came from this city, Anderson included, and Quincy Jones, another Garfield alum! And it was a great city for getting noticed. When bigger artists came through town, they were met by passionate audiences, and local artists had lots of opportunities to play gigs with touring artists and use those opportunities to join touring acts.

Atul: Sounds like just the thing a teenage singer with big dreams would've been looking for.

TK: Yup. Within a few months, Ernestine was making friends with other young musicians, such as Quincy Jones and Grace Holden. They would jam at the Central District YMCA, and eventually Anderson, Jones, and others were recruited to be a part of a Blackwell's Junior Band, led by Robert "Bumps" Blackwell, who ran the Washington Social and Educational Club above a

butcher shop on Madison. Before long, they were touring Jackson Street night clubs, military bases, and fairs.

Atul: setting high standards for high schoolers everywhere.

TK: Yeah, tell me about it. And then in 1947 when Anderson was 18, she caught wind of the perfect opportunity. Johnny Otis was coming to town and was looking for a new singer for his band. She rocked the audition and informed her parents that she was quitting high school to go on tour.

Atul: What?! So what happened after she left high school?

TK: As they say, the rest is pretty much history!

Atul: Really, TK?

TK: Ok, well, somewhat. She toured with Otis for a little while, then stayed in Los Angeles when it was all over. She joined some other bands, got married, had her first kid, and continued to perform. Her family moved back to Seattle but in 1952 she earned a spot in Lionel Hampton's jazz orchestra, where she and Jones were reunited. A series of ups and downs including small commercial releases brought her increasing notoriety in the jazz world. She was invited to tour Scandinavia with the Rolf Ericson combo, and it was during this time that she recorded her first full-length album in 1956, which became a hit in Europe.

Her *big* break finally came when this album was re-released in the US in 1958 as *Hot Cargo* to critical and widespread acclaim.

Atul: And that's the album that's on display at MOHAI.

TK: Yup. And now, as they say, the rest is pretty much history. She enjoyed a decades long career, recorded over 30 albums, and was nominated for a Grammy four times.

Atul: Wow... I can't wait to go listen to some of her music. And I can't believe how much the Central District has changed since then.

TK: And how quickly it's been changing too.

*(slow music fades in and out)*

Atul: Now the Central District is experiencing rapid population changes, but a very different kind than those in the 40s and 50s. In 1970, census data shows that this part of the city was 73

percent African American. By 2014, it had decreased to just 19 percent. That number is still changing.

TK: Many of the people who once lived in the Central District are leaving or being pushed out. The causes are complex, including increasing housing costs, legacies of discrimination and disinvestment, gentrification, and a gradual lifting of more direct housing restrictions.

Atul: Different people have different definitions of gentrification—be it people being forced out of their homes, local businesses being replaced by larger companies, a matter of economic growth, increasing property values, so many things - and it's happening seemingly...everywhere.

TK: Any apparent positive changes tied to gentrification are also tied to trends of longtime residents getting priced out of their own neighborhoods, of these longtime residents becoming economically marginalized.

(pause)

TK: The movement of people in and out of the city, sometimes by force, sometimes by choice, has shown up a lot in the podcast so far.

Atul: Yeah, which is maybe why I keep bringing up Al Smith's photographs. They really are a great snapshot of a community at a particular moment in time, even though Seattle's communities are constantly changing. His photos have an important role to play in telling Seattle's story. It makes me wonder what people are doing to document the Central District *now*.

TK: Well, people are doing so many things! If you're looking for another podcast, *The Shelf Life Community Story* project is recording oral histories with current and former residents of the Central District, which they share online. But there's also the work of the Wa Na Wari, the Liberty Bank Building project, Africatown, and more.

Atul: That's pretty cool.

*(Music)*

Atul: We hope you enjoyed what you learned. If you want to learn more, come visit the museum in sunny South Lake Union Seattle, or visit the MOHAI website at [www.mohai.org](http://www.mohai.org). That's M-O-H-A-I dot org. Unfortunately, the *Seattle On The Spot* exhibit is not up anymore, but you can find the exhibit companion book at the Seattle Public Library.

Atul: Tune in next time to learn more about how one leg changed the LGBTQ community in Seattle, forever. *(Atul and TK whisper "forever" repeatedly into the microphone at an uncomfortably close distance) (Laughter)*

*(Outro Music)*

Finch: This is Finch. I'm one of our editors, here with the credits.

This episode was researched by Julia, written by Emily C., and recorded by Emily T. Our editors are Grace and myself. I wrote our theme music, and performed it along with Tyler and friend of the pod Sylvie Wang. Our logo was designed by Grace. Marketing help came from Julia, Tyler, and Grace.

Special thanks to Pei Pei, Chris, Tori, and our beloved Emily - the one who gets angry at planes, our celery queen, bringer of all snacks and tea, and fashion icon. Stay dry out there!

*(Music fades out)*