

## Introduction

Kathryne Thompson is somewhat of a mystery in saxophone history. She wrote three saxophone method books in the 1920s, a handful of solos, directed the Southern California Saxophone Band, and was an accomplished teacher and saxophonist in Los Angeles. But what else did we know about her? In his book, *Saxophone Soloists and their Music, 1844-1985* Harry Gee writes that Thompson studied with Edward Lefebre, had a saxophone school with over 100 students enrolled at a time, was the director of the Southern California Saxophone Band, and gave her students “catchy stage names which often bordered on the ludicrous.”<sup>1</sup> Besides a paragraph of information that focuses more on the novelty of her students, there really is quite little written about Kathryne Thompson, and her role as musician has either been ignored or diminished in much of the research done on saxophonists in the early twentieth century. The purpose for this research is to better understand Thompson’s role as a performer, teacher, pedagogue, and leading saxophonist in the Los Angeles area.

It is sometimes difficult to find biographical information about women musicians. Jean Pool outlines two major obstacles: First, women are more likely to change their names when marrying so in order to research one woman, the researcher has to look under several names. Second, women are more likely than men to hide their birthdates or subtract 10 years from each 20 years they have lived.<sup>2</sup> Both of these problems can hinder research, as they do in the case of Kathryne Thompson.

In this paper, I cover the following areas on Kathryne Thompson’s life; her early solo work covering the years 1900-1924, her radio performances on KHJ, the Thompson Progressive

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<sup>1</sup> Harry R. Gee, *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music, 1844-1985* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 160.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannie Pool, “Researching Women in Music in California,” in *California’s Musical Wealth*, ed. Stephen M. Fry (Southern California Chapter Music Library Association, 1988), 126

School for Saxophone, her work as a soloist and leader of the Southern California Saxophone Band, and the circumstances around Thompson's method book, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, which is the first published jazz method book for saxophone.



Fig. 1. Kathryn Thompson on the cover of "Valse Minah," by Kathryn Thompson (Pittsburgh: Volkwein Brothers, 1939)

## Chapter I Early Solo Work

Little information exists on Thompson's early life, including her birth. Thompson was born to Caroline Thompson in 1889 in the state of Illinois, where she was the youngest of five children. By 1900, Kathryn's father had died and her mom relocated the family to California; Kathryn was listed as a student on the census form from that year. How she picked up the saxophone is unknown, but as early as 1903, Kathryn performed at the local YMCA in Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup> In the announcement of this engagement in the *Los Angeles Times* her name is listed as Kitty Thompson, and as a teenager and well into her professional career, she went by the name of Kittie or Kitty Thompson.<sup>4</sup> In 1909, Edward Lefebre, the famous saxophonist with the Gilmore and Sousa band, visited Los Angeles. Kathryn met Lefebre and it is at this time that she studied with him. It appears that Lefebre was quite fond of Kathryn and they had a close relationship until Lefebre's death in 1911.<sup>5</sup> Kathryn made a public appearance with Lefebre and the quartet he formed in Los Angeles. Kathryn played the alto saxophone, along with Ida Weber on tenor and Mr. R.O. Robinson Jr. on baritone.<sup>6</sup>

After 1909, Thompson had played in a variety of venues and possibly toured. She was a soloist with Moore's Band and at Union High School.<sup>7</sup> Prior to 1912, she toured with the Navassar Band of Ladies of New York but there is no information on how long she played with this organization.<sup>8</sup> Thompson didn't just play with local bands; she also headlined a month long

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<sup>3</sup> "Y.M.C.A. Educational," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1903, A2.

<sup>4</sup> In a series of articles she wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, she signed off as Kittie or Kitty. See Kathryn E. Thompson, "Rhapsodic Radiations," April 15, 1923, II8; "Radio Made Clear as Mud" April 22, 1923, IV13; "Learn how to be Radioish" May 28, 1923, I7; and "Whatness of Air Waves" June 3, 1923, II6.

<sup>5</sup> James Russell Noyes. "Edward A. Lefebre (1834-1911): Preeminent saxophonist of the nineteenth century," (D.M.A. diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2000) 187.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Julian Johnson, "Music and Musicians," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1912, III2; "Covina Songsters to be Heard Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1912, II8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

engagement at Brinks Cabaret that year with Signor Parmegami, a clarinetist.<sup>9</sup> By 1916, Thompson was playing at women's Gamut club in Los Angeles, working with Henry Schoenfeld, the director of the Los Angeles Women's Orchestra, where she appeared as a soloist.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 2. An announcement of Thompson's performance with the Union High School Band. *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1912, pg. II8.

<sup>9</sup> "Comic Opera at Majestic," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1912, III1.

<sup>10</sup> "Musical," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1916, III1; "Musical," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1916, III1. In this article, Thompson's last name appears as in one article as Tigham and the other article as Higham. It's very possible that Thompson married at this time, although no marriage announcements could be found. By 1918, Thompson is performing under her maiden name. What remains of her first husband is unknown. The census form in 1920 lists Kathryne as single and not divorced or widowed.

By 1918, Thompson was a teacher at Frank J. Hart Southern California Music Company which was the main dealer of Buescher instruments in the Los Angeles area.<sup>11</sup> At this time, the Southern California Music Company had twenty-one employees serving in World War I. It is quite possible that Thompson was hired as the saxophone specialist to make up for the loss of workers. After the war ended, she remained at the store and became one of the featured artists in their advertisements.<sup>12</sup> By 1921, Southern California Music Company was including a free course of lessons taught by Kathryn with each saxophone purchase.



Fig. 3. Advertisement for Frank. J. Hart Southern California Music Company offering free lessons from Kathryn E. Thompson for every saxophone purchased at the store. *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1921, pg. III.

<sup>11</sup>“Annual Fashion Show Week in Los Angeles Gives Dealers Opportunity for Fine Displays,” *The Music Trades*, v. 56, September 28, 1918, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Display Ad 31,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1919, III.

It is unclear how long Thompson stayed with the store. Southern California Music Company is responsible for publishing her works for the saxophone and also sponsored the Southern California Saxophone Band, which she led, so it appears they maintained a good relationship after she left the store to start her own school.

During the 1920s, Thompson had the opportunity to play in larger concert venues. On April 20, 1923, Thompson, along with Lillian Althouse, one of her most successful students, played a benefit concert for the Grotto Band at the Hollywood Bowl.<sup>13</sup> In 1924, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce sponsored a trip to Hawaii to open up trade with the island and Thompson, along with the Sorority Six, provided the musical entertainment.<sup>14</sup> The Sorority Six was a group from the University of Southern California and included the following musicians: Dorothy Conant on cello, Betty Rupeck on violin, Florence Kitzmiller as a vocalist, Evelyn Cobb on traps, and Edith Griffith on piano. The drum set suggests that this group was a dance orchestra.

Thompson displayed great versatility as a saxophonist by playing in a variety of ensembles and as a soloist. Thus, it is likely that her choice of repertoire was quite varied as well. While there is no indication what she played as a soloist, descriptions of her work on the radio gives us insight into her repertoire.

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<sup>13</sup> "Grotto Band Relief Fund to Get Boost," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1923, II7.

<sup>14</sup> "New Island Trip Features," *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1923, A8.

## Chapter II

### Radio Performances on KHJ

In 1922 radio broadcast frequencies were opened up for public consumption. In that year alone the Commerce Department issued 570 broadcast licenses, which led to the beginning of the radio craze.<sup>15</sup> In Los Angeles, various radio stations began operating including KHJ, which was affiliated with the *Los Angeles Times* and broadcast from the Los Angeles Times Building. On April 23, 1922, KHJ broadcasted its first radio program.<sup>16</sup> It began as a non-commercial station offering the residents of Los Angeles a variety of musical performances. Since it was connected to the *LA Times*, it was in the paper's best interest to promote the station and the musicians appearing on the various programs. These advertisements paint a portrait of the programming, the musicians, and the popular music of this era.

Days after KHJ began broadcasting, on April 26, Kathryn Thompson made her first radio broadcast, alongside Bessie Womer on piano and Eleanor Gale, a soprano (see fig. 4). The selection of music included "Out of the Shadows," a piece by Thompson, with Gale singing the vocal part and Thompson playing an obbligato line under the vocals, and a performance of "I'll forget you."<sup>17</sup> Thompson returned to the radio in December of that year. In her absence, Lillian Althouse appeared over ten times in 1922 alone. Thompson returned to the radio on December 24 and 28 of that year, playing duets with Althouse and in a saxophone quartet with Althouse and two of Thompson's students, Emily Miller and Margaret Packard.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alfred Balk, *The Rise of the Radio, from Marconi through the Golden Age*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2006) 41.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Ralph L. Power, "Radioland," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1926, B8.

<sup>17</sup> "Club Singers Give Program," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1922, III.

<sup>18</sup> "KHJ Favorites Please Again," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1923, II3.



Fig. 4. Kathryn Thompson pictured with her fellow performers on her first radio performance. Thompson is the second from the right. *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1922, pg. II10.

In this time period, female musicians had a large presence on the radio. In the infancy of the medium, performing on the radio was not compensated, so women often were called on to fill the airwaves.<sup>19</sup> Thompson, along with Althouse, were a few of the female saxophonist who filled the airwaves in 1922. As radio became more commercially successful, the gender dynamic changed.

Thompson was an early favorite on the radio. Critics praised her performances, describing her as the leading saxophonist or "the best saxophone soloist in seven states" or even

<sup>19</sup> Leora M. Sies and Luther F. Sies, *The Encyclopedia of Women in Radio, 1920-1960* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2003) 220.



the “most famous women saxophone player in the West.”<sup>20</sup> The hyperbole surrounding her playing is marked by such exclamations as “She makes the cosmos undulated, with melodic rhyme. Apollo can have his harp and Homer his lyre, I’ll take Kathryn Thompson’s saxophone.”<sup>21</sup> Her work helped change popular perceptions of the saxophone in Los Angeles. “Make those saxophones Behave, Kathryn, Lillian” was the caption the advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* for Thompson and Althouse performance on KHJ on March 10, 1923 indicating that both of these women have tamed the saxophone.<sup>22</sup> This perception followed both Thompson and Althouse performances throughout their years at KHJ.



Fig. 5. “Make Those Saxophones Behave Kathryn, Lillian” printed in the announcement for the night’s radio broadcast on KHJ. *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1923.

<sup>20</sup> Ben A. Markson, “Tweet, Tweet! Chirp, Chirp!” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 28, 1923, II3, and Claire Forbes Crane. “Radioland,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 11, 1925, B11.

<sup>21</sup> Ben A. Markson, “Tweet, Tweet! Chirp, Chirp!” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 28, 1923, II3.

<sup>22</sup> “Pomona College Glee Club to Harmonize Tonight,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1923, II2.

In 1923, Kathryne increased her exposure on the radio playing as a soloist, in duets, and as a soloist with the Southern California Saxophone Band. The most notable performance was on June 2, 1923 where she performs alongside Jascha Gurewich.<sup>23</sup> It is this performance that Jascha performs “Kathryne”, a romance that Gurewich wrote for Thompson.

In the end of 1923, KHJ began to provide sponsors for programming, mainly to provide musicians compensation for their radio performances. It is not clear how much money each musician was making, but KHJ’s budget for performers was \$6000 a month.<sup>24</sup> Once musicians started getting paid, the competition for radio performances increased. Certainly at this time a larger variety of musicians began to perform on the radio, especially bands or orchestras that catered to dance music. While Thompson chose not to go this route, she becomes even more visible on the radio as the leader of the Southern California Saxophone Band. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4. 1924 is also the year that her new husband, Lewis D’Ippolito, makes his first KHJ radio appearance, playing duets with Kathryne.<sup>25</sup>

It is uncertain when D’Ippolito and Thompson married. I was unable to find their marriage announcement, and Kathryne always performed under her maiden name. I am also not sure how Thompson and D’Ippolito met. Lewis D’Ippolito was a saxophonist from New Jersey who came to California sometime before 1924. They continued to perform together on the radio and in church, and later collaborated on method books for the music classroom. D’Ippolito taught at Kathryne’s school, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

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<sup>23</sup> Ben A. Markson, “Historic Wood Hums for KHJ,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1923, II6.

<sup>24</sup> “Early Days of KHJ Recalled,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1925, A3.

<sup>25</sup> “KHJ The Times Radiophone,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1924, A2.



Fig. 6. Announcement for nightly performance on KHJ. Thompson is in the upper right hand corner and Lewis D'Ippolito is in the lower left hand corner. *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 24, 1926, pg. A8.

By 1926 Thompson had her own radio show. The Thompson Progressive School for Saxophone first aired on January 15, 1926; Thompson, D'Ippolito, and other musicians performed on the afternoon hour from 2:30-3:30 pm for the rest of the year. By this time, Thompson was using the radio to promote her school through her own program and through her students performing on other radio shows, like the Children's Hour.

The music Thompson performed on the radio can be divided into two major groups. The first consists of pieces written specifically for the saxophone. Thompson played many of her

own works for saxophone like “Valse Minah,” “Suite d Amour,” and “Bubble and Squeak.”<sup>26</sup>

She also covered popular saxophone solos of the time, like “Bud Rag” by Budd L. Cross, “Laverne” by H. Benne Henton, “Gondolier” and “Boat Song” by James Urbanek, “Piggly Wiggle” by Edward Barroll, as well as works by Jascha Gurewich and Clay Smith.<sup>27</sup>

The other main category is popular vocal works, ranging from barbershop quartets to operas and operettas. Most of this music was written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and covers a wide range of styles. Opera and operetta selections included “Musetta’s Waltz” from *La Boheme* and “Giannina Mia” by Rudolf Friml from the musical comedy *The Firefly*.<sup>28</sup> The popular songs included “La Golondrina,” a traditional Mexican song written in 1882; “Absent” by John W. Metcalf (1899); “By a Window in Bagdad” by George P. Hulten and Jesse Glick (1920);, a barbershop quartet entitled “That Tumbled Down Shack in Athlone” by Richard W. Pascoe and Alma Sanders; “Fleur de Lys” by Robert Levenson (1919) and “Twilight” by Charles W. Thompson (1919).<sup>29</sup> Thompson also wrote a vocal work entitled “Waiting for You” that was performed on the radio.<sup>30</sup> In fact, “Waiting for You” is one of Thompson’s best-known works, which was arranged for band by Harry L. Alford.

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<sup>26</sup> “KHJ Favorites Please Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2; Dr. Ralph Power, “Morale Open Shop Urged,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1927, A14; Dr. Ralph Power, “Radio Activities,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1927, A11.

<sup>27</sup> “KHJ Favorites Please Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2; Ben A. Markson, “Glee Club Sings for KHJ,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1923, II6; Paul Sheedy, “Young Stars are Feature at Radio Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1925, A9; Ben A. Markson, “Lute Enchants KHJ’s Audience,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1923, II2; Ben A. Markson, “Historic Wood Hums for KHJ,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1923, II6.

<sup>28</sup> “Saxophones ‘Go on Air,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1923, II3; Ben A. Markson, “Glee Club Sings for KHJ,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1923, II6.

<sup>29</sup> “KHJ Favorites Please Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2; Ben A. Markson, “Glee Club Sings for KHJ,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1923, II6; Dr. Ralph L. Power, “Radio Activities,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1927, A9; Ben A. Markson, “Tweet, Tweet! Chirp, Chirp!” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1923, II3.

<sup>30</sup> Claire Forbes Crane. “Saxophone Band Pleases,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925, B8.



Fig. 7. Cover of "Waiting for You," by Kathryn Thompson (Los Angeles: Thompson Music. Co, 1924)

Thompson also performed on the radio with vocalists. Vocal music at this time did not include a saxophone part so she would improvise an obbligato line underneath the vocalist. The technique is covered in the *Ragtime Saxophonist*, and will be discussed in Chapter 5. One piece

Thompson performed, “The Soothing Saxophone Song” written by saxophonist Ed Barroll in 1922, included a saxophone accompaniment to the vocal line.<sup>31</sup>

On several occasions, Thompson performed with one or more saxophonists. She often performed duets with Lillian Althouse, and on a few occasions she performed in a saxophone quartet. Thompson often performed vocal works in a saxophone duet. It is unclear how the saxophonists divided up the vocal line, but there are a few possibilities. The easiest way to perform a vocal work would be for one saxophonist to the melody and the second saxophonist playing the harmony. Another possibility is that one saxophonist played the melody while the second embellished the melody using popular rag methods. In Thompson’s “Valse Minah” (see Ex. 1, below), she includes a second saxophone part which provides a counter melody and harmonic support. This gives us an idea how she performed vocal music in duets.

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<sup>31</sup> “Over the Field,” *The Lyceum Magazine*, July 1922, 42.

Ex. 1: "Valse Minah," by Kathryn E. Thompson, 1926

*Lovingly dedicated to my brother, Minah D. Thompson*

## "VALSE MINAH"

PIANO ACC. (For all Saxophones Eb, Bb & C.) KATHRYNE E. THOMPSON

The musical score for "Valse Minah" is written for Piano Accompaniment and Saxophone. The piano part is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). The tempo is marked "Tempo di Valse caprice". The piano part includes dynamics such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *p* (piano), and articulation markings like *poco rall* (poco rallentando) and *poco rit* (poco ritardando). The saxophone part is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). The tempo is marked "Tempo di Valse". The saxophone part includes dynamics such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte), and articulation markings like *poco rall* and *poco rit*. The score includes repeat signs and first/second endings. The piano part ends with a "To Coda" marking.

In 1927 Thompson was on the radio only ten times, and eight of those times were before May. The reason for the decline is that in July 1927 Kathryn Thompson has her first child, Caroline. By this time, Kathryn was 38 and her husband, Lewis D'Ippolito, was 29. It was quite unusual for a woman at this time to have her first child at this late in life, but Kathryn was

working as a musician throughout her early adulthood. Thompson's popularity is evident in the birth announcement:

#### STORK VISITS MUSICIAN

Mrs. Lewis D'Ippolito, Radio Player, Mother of Baby Girl  
On the 1<sup>st</sup> inst., a potential radio start was announced with the birth of Caroline Marietta D'Ippolito of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis D'Ippolito. Mrs. D'Ippolito is perhaps better known to radioland as Kathryne Thompson of Thompson Progressive School of Music.

She is a widely known composer and saxophone soloist. In the early days of KHJ broadcast the Kathryne Thompson Saxophone Band was a feature of broadcast and since then from time to time her radio solo work has won her much acclaim.<sup>32</sup>

Thompson played throughout her pregnancy. She performed in April, when she was 6-7 months pregnant, on KHJ's 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary special soloing with the Golden State Band, with Harold Roberts directing from the 12:00-1:00 AM time slot.<sup>33</sup> Before that, she cut down her performances on the radio but still made several appearances on the Children's Hour talk segment about a Nature Library series.<sup>34</sup>

One might assume that with the birth of Kathryne's first child, she gave up the life of a radio star, but that is not the case. By September she was back performing on the radio. The advertisement for the program noted, "The night's radio offering brought the return of Kathryne Thompson, saxophone soloist, who has been absent from KHJ programs for several months."<sup>35</sup> The author did not disclose the reason for her absence. Thompson performed only one more time, in November, before retiring from the radio. The reason was not her new role as a mother, but rather, changes in radio law that went into effect in 1927. The Radio Act, which was created to clean up the airwaves and provide independence for local radio stations, ended up consolidating the power of the few commercial stations on the East Coast and cleared channels

<sup>32</sup> "Stork Visits Musician." *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1927, B6.

<sup>33</sup> "Fifth Radio Birthday at Station KHJ," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3 1927, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Ralph Power. "Morale Open Shop Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1927, A14.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Ralph Power. "KHJ to Follow Col. Lindbergh," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1927, A9.



throughout the United States to allow for the East Coast stations to broadcast nationally.<sup>36</sup> At this time, many of the radio stations lost their broadcast frequencies, were sold as clear channels, or had to revamp their programming in order to compete with the major broadcasters. KHJ suffered the latter fate, and only four days after Thompson and D'Ippolito gave their last performance at KHJ the station was sold to Don Lee.<sup>37</sup> This resulted in a new broadcast schedule, with a permanent orchestra and regular weekly shows. The eclectic programming of KHJ under the *LA Times* was over. It is unclear whether Kathryne Thompson played on KHJ or any other station after 1927, but with the changes brought about by the Radio Act of 1927, Kathryne, along with many other women performers, was effectively kicked off the airwaves to make room for professional orchestras.

From 1922-1927, Thompson gave over eighty performances on KHJ. Those do not include performances of her students that she accompanied on saxophone or piano. Her students also gave over eighty performances in those years, and Lillian Althouse, who was by then a professional musician, performed 27 times. It is clear that Thompson's work opened the door for other women to perform on the radio. Overall, more than a dozen women saxophonists performed on KHJ from 1922-1927, and more than that if you include dance orchestras or jazz bands. This was common at the time, and more research needs to be done on female performers on the radio. Since many of the performance opportunities were unpaid, women were often the first musicians to get on the radio. It was only after radio became a commercial success that women were kicked off of the airwave

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<sup>36</sup> Hugh Richard Slotten, *Radio's Hidden Voice* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 108-112.

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Ralph L Power. "Radio Activities," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1927, A11; "Radio KHJ in New Hands," *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1927, A1.

### Chapter III

#### The Thompson Progressive School for Saxophone

Kathryne Thompson was an active teacher beginning sometime in the 1910s but it is not clear when she opened her saxophone school. It has already been noted that she taught at the Southern California Music Company until 1921. By 1922 she had an established studio at 2410 Twelfth Avenue in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> Her most famous student up to that point was Lillian Althouse, who went on to teach at the Winn-Kearney School of Music in Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> Other students of Kathryne's like Margaret Packard and Florence Michalek, also performed on the radio in its early days.<sup>3</sup> While the paper noted that these girls were students of Thompson's, the paper does not indicate if they were students at the Thompson Progressive School for Saxophone.

The first mention of the Thompson Progressive School for Saxophone is in the *LA Times* in September of 1925.<sup>4</sup> Radio performances by Thompson's students were limited to about a dozen performers from 1922-1924. Beginning in 1925, Thompson's student exposure increased drastically. Between 1925 and 1927 over forty of Thompson's students performed regularly on KHJ during the Children's Hour Program, and many appeared multiple times. Their ages ranged from 10-17, which suggests that Thompson primarily taught high school and junior high students.

In the two years that the school operated, Kathryne and Lewis D'Ippolito were the main teachers. Two others —Carrie Fox and Carlo Carciotto—are credited in the newspaper, but they received far less press coverage than Thompson and D'Ippolito. The school did not advertise

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<sup>1</sup> "Kathryne E. Thompson," *The Lyceum Magazine*, v. 32, n. 5, October, 1922, 27.

<sup>2</sup> "Ethereal .. Melodies ..Broadcast," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1922, II10.

<sup>3</sup> "KHJ Favorites Please Again," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2, Ben A. Markson. "Imagination is Stirred by KHJ," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1923, II3.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Sheedy, "Hawaiian Trip Marvels Told," *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1925, A2.

their services in the music instruction section of the *LA Times*, but instead focused solely on print coverage and the radio shows where the school's teachers and students performed on a regular basis. The school was widely successful and had an enrollment of over 100 saxophonists.<sup>5</sup>

There does seem to be some confusion over the name of the school. In Joseph Murphy's dissertation on early saxophone instruction in American institutions, he cites it as the Thompson-D'Ippolito School of Saxophone, based on a Buescher catalog from 1927.<sup>6</sup> This version of the school's name has been reprinted in various articles and works on Kathryne Thompson. While it may seem a minor error, it has major implications, because it diminishes Thompson's influence as a performer and teacher. Murphy's only source was a pamphlet geared towards nationwide distribution, where the recipients would probably not be familiar with Thompson as a performer or her teaching methods. Attaching D'Ippolito's name perhaps provided more credibility to an audience who might be uncomfortable with a woman leading a saxophone school. However, the name of the school is reflected in the title of one of Kathryne's method books, *The Thompson Progressive Method for the Saxophone*.

In the Los Angeles region, Thompson was already a popular musician and teacher. Not only had she been featured in advertisements for saxophones, but she had also established a strong radio presence. Lewis D'Ippolito, on the other hand, was still fairly new to the area. His association with Thompson began in 1924. It would be unnecessary or even foolish to attach his name to the school when Thompson was already an established star in Los Angeles.

Thompson taught a wide range of students, but her legacy as a teacher has been obscured by the novel and the weird information emphasized in books and dissertations. This focus on novelty begins in Fred Hemke's dissertation on the saxophone, where he mentions that

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Murphy. "Early Saxophone instruction in American educational institutions." (D.M.A. diss., Northwestern University, 1994) 122.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Thompson's students were given stage names like "America's little Pavlova" or "Miss America," and that Thompson's most famous students were Daisy and Violet Hilton, a pair of conjoined twins.<sup>7</sup> No information establishes when the twins studied with Thompson, but the Hilton sisters performed on the vaudeville circuit throughout the Twenties, and in 1932 they made their big screen debut as supporting characters in Tod Browning's now cult classic, *Freaks*. During the wedding dinner scene they can be seen playing soprano saxophones for the guests. Unfortunately, the composer for the score focused on the harmonica in the scene, so there is no soundtrack to accompany the sister's playing. The popularity of the Hilton sisters and their connection to Thompson along with the focus on stage names overshadows the performances of Thompson's students who were not in show business.

Looking at Thompson's student performances and her method books give us a more complete picture as to what was taught at the school. Thompson taught her students many of the same techniques she used as a performer. The majority of pieces her students performed were vocal transcriptions and saxophone works. Among the vocal works, her students play works like Arthur Penn's "Love Shadows," "When the Sun Goes Down," and "Love's Garden of Roses."<sup>8</sup> She also taught the following songs: "Swanee River Moon," a waltz by H. Pitman Clarke (1921); "Do You Remember" by Llewellyn Davies and Gerald Beaumont (1877); "The World is Waiting for a Sunrise" by Ernest Seitz (1919), "June Brought the Roses" by John Openshaw (1924), and the popular cowboy song "The Trail of Yesterday."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fred L. Hemke. "The Early History of the Saxophone." (D.M.A. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975) 453-454.

<sup>8</sup> "KHJ Favorites Please Again," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2; Dr. Ralph Power, "Chamber Music Origins Traced," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1927, A13; Dr. Ralph Power, "Kilocycle Use Made Official," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1927, A8.

<sup>9</sup> Ben A. Markson, "Imagination is Stirred by KHJ," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1923, II3; Paul Sheedy, "Antipodes Hear KHJ Entertain," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1925, A3; Dr. Ralph L. Power, "KHJ Observes Beethoven Day," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1927, A13; Dr. Ralph L. Power, "Radio Useful Train Adjunct," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1927, A13.

She also taught many saxophone pieces to her students, the great majority of which were her own works. Other pieces written for the saxophone that her students played were “Concerto,” “Kathryne,” and “Ballet de Concert” by Jascha Gurewich; “Sax King” by R. Chenette; and “Spirit of Joy” by Clay Smith.<sup>10</sup> What is fascinating is that her students played far more vocal pieces than saxophone works, most likely because there were few published saxophone solos at that time.

In order to perform many of these vocal works, her students needed to learn how to transpose at sight. In the *Thompson Progressive Method for the Saxophone*, Thompson lays out the groundwork for transposition for Eb and Bb instruments. She suggests that students should return to the first set of studies and play them in various transpositions.<sup>11</sup> She even wrote a supplement in 1922, *Thompson’s Studies in Bass Clef* to help saxophonist’s master transposition at sight. This was an important skill at the time, but as the popularity of the saxophone grew throughout the twenties the saxophone repertoire grew larger and transposition became less important for saxophonists.

The *Thompson Progressive Method of Saxophone* also gives us insights into Thompson’s teaching method. She writes in a very conversational manner, and signs the introduction as “Your fellow student.” Many of the etudes have a separate accompaniment, so playing duets with students was probably common. She includes exercises that address difficult problems for the beginning student, like how to attack a repeated note or change octaves without changing their embouchure. She also includes many of her own solos, like “Valse Caprice” and “Bubble

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<sup>10</sup> Mae Pryce Brooks, “City Guardians Give Concert,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1926, A5; Claire Forbes Crane, “Radioland,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1925, C14; Dr. Ralph L. Power, “Fading Cause Fan’s Grief,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1927, A5; Dr. Ralph L. Power, “New Band Open for Broadcast,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1927, A5; “KHJ Favorites Please Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1922, II2.

<sup>11</sup> K.E. Thompson, *The Thompson Progressive Method for the Saxophone*, (Pittsburgh: Volkwein Bros. Inc, 1939), 114-116.

and Squeak,” with the instruction to secure the piano part from a music dealer or from the publisher.<sup>12</sup> She also promotes Lillian Althouse method book, *Half Hour Studies*, as a supplement.<sup>13</sup>

Near the end of the book Thompson dives into basic musicianship and how to make music out of the skills learned in the first one hundred pages. She suggests students to listen to vocalist to give them a good idea how to phrase a melody. She explains the process of following the musical line: crescendo as you ascend and decrescendo as you fall. What is unique about this method book is that Thompson does not just cover the basics of playing the saxophone, but also how to improve musicianship through mental practicing and ear training. She suggests the method *Tone Thinking and Ear Training* by Carolyn Alchin as a good place to begin to learn how to play by ear.<sup>14</sup> Thompson considered playing the saxophone to be very serious business. In her method book she writes, “I hope you will give to your saxophone the same consideration you would any other musical instrument, such as violin or piano or the human voice, and that you will not make the serious mistake of regarding it as TOO EASY to require practice.”<sup>15</sup> She was trying to change the perception of the saxophone at this time away as obscene and vulgar and to elevate the respectability of the instrument.

Thompson’s school probably closed in 1927 because she had her first child. It is possible the school could have survived longer, but in 1927 D’Ippolito took a job as the brass and reed teacher at Long Beach High School.<sup>16</sup> Without Thompson as a teacher and D’Ippolito with

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 101. Carolyn Alchin was a well-known pianist, theorist, and composer in the Los Angeles area in the 1920s. Along with publishing several music theory books, she had her own studio and taught summer classes at the University of Southern California. See the article “Plans Laid for Music Writer’s Funeral Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1926, 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Ralph L Power, “Radio Activities,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1927, A9.

another job, the probability of the school's success was limited. In 1928 or 1929 Thompson has her second child, so it is probable that by 1928, Thompson's school was closed.

## Chapter IV

### The Southern California Saxophone Band

When it was founded in 1921 the Southern California Saxophone Band was one of the largest saxophone bands in the country. When the band began, the general opinion of the saxophone was very negative. While hugely popular, the instrument had an image problem due to its connection with jazz and novelty pieces. The band, which initially was not greeted with enthusiasm, quickly won over skeptics.

The formation of the band was first announced in the *LA Times* on July 4, 1921. The band was formed by Dwight M. McCaughey who was the director of the band and orchestra department of the Harvard Military School.<sup>1</sup> The band rehearsed at the assembly hall in the LA Times Building and in the warehouse of Southern California Music Company. McCaughey's vision was to make this band the largest saxophone band of the West.<sup>2</sup> Even with the support of the *LA Times*, the newspaper was quick to insult the new band. In its first announcement, they quipped that the "saxophone ...some say caused the war."<sup>3</sup> The next day, the Times printed an article on the band that was no less cruel in its biting satire.

There may be some question as to whether an organization composed of sixty saxophone performers is a band or a mob. The formation of such a group in this city is apt to be received with mixed emotions. The announcement that the members will train in The Times Building is bewildering. The Times has always been so urgent for peace and international amity. It has patiently and persistently advocated a League of Nations in the interest of world harmony. For it now to turn loose a battery of sixty ebullient saxophones at one swipe is likely to arouse consternation in the community. Through stress of circumstances people have been accustoming themselves to a couple of saxophone or maybe three. It was accepted as a part of the penalty of jazz and our men and women were learning to smilingly endure. But sixty saxophones at

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<sup>1</sup> "Display Ad 73," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1921, II1; . Oh, Listen to the Band!" *Jacobs' Band Monthly*, v. 6 no. 9, September 1921, 37.

<sup>2</sup> "Sixty of Them to Wail as One," *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1921, II5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*



one fell swoop seems different. The announcement of the formation of a brass band composed wholly of saxophones might easily arouse terror. If one saxophone is a misdemeanor sixty of them might amount to a holocaust or a shambles. How can the nation talk disarmament at a time when one of its greatest cities is mobilizing sixty saxophones for purposed of offense? Is it that the mere announcement will send the rest of the world to filing a plea in abatement?<sup>4</sup>

This article may seem little inflammatory, but it does convey the popular perception of saxophone at this time. The saxophone was not only a relatively young instrument, but it also represented the emergence of the jazz age. After the successful passage of the Volstead Act, one of the new targets of the temperance movement was the saxophone. One newspaper article focuses on the connection between drinking and listening to jazz and recommends “if America is to be made safe for the immaculate another amendment to the Constitution may be necessary. We will have to disarm our massive batteries of saxophones.”<sup>5</sup> Even in Washington D.C. the head of the Women’s Bureau, Sergt. Rhoda Milliken, attempted to define immoral music as the playing of the saxophone but failed after another officer, who was an avid saxophonist, rejected the idea. “The saxophone is elevating and respectable, if directed right.”<sup>6</sup> With this outrage directed at the saxophone, why would McCaughey attempt to form the largest saxophone band in the country?

While his reasons are unknown, it is likely that the Southern California Music Company had a vested interest in promoting the band. The more popular the band, the more saxophones it could sell and the more exposure the saxophone would receive. The Southern California Music Company also made membership of the band open to women, which made it unique for its day.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Debt and Danger,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1921, II4.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Brown, “Jazz and Hooch,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1921, II4.

<sup>6</sup> “Music Played on Saxophone Held Immoral,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1925, E10.

<sup>7</sup> “Display Ad 73,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1921, III1.



Fig. 8. Advertisement for the Southern California Saxophone Band. The ad calls for saxophonists who play soprano, alto, C melody, tenor, baritone and bass. The band is also open to “both ladies and gentlemen.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1921, pg. III.

While there were many military bands at this time, it is almost impossible to find one that included both men and women in its ranks. Women were almost always excluded, except perhaps as a guest soloist. Without female members, the task of creating the largest saxophone band in the West would have been more difficult. Moreover, as Kathryn Thompson was already teaching at Southern California Music Company, it would have been foolish for the band not to accept women because then she would have been excluded, and she was the most popular saxophone teacher at their store.

The initial skepticism that greeted the band was forgotten soon after the first public rehearsal, but yet the reporter's sarcasm was on full display. "The meeting was held within the city limits of Los Angeles and after extensive investigation it was found that there was no disturbance as a result of this unique combination."<sup>8</sup> Not only were there no disturbances, but the first song "astonished the music critics."<sup>9</sup>

In 1922, the Saxophone Band played its first public performance, a dance for the *LA Times*. The next year, the band makes its first radio appearance on January 15, 1923. Even though the band was down to 42 members, it was the largest number of musicians to play for a radio broadcast on KHJ.<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Thompson and Lillian Althouse were both featured soloists.<sup>11</sup> This performance also featured a marimba solo by Sherdena Aston and the tenor vocalist Arthur Reed.

The band's most prominent soloist was Jascha Gurewich, who performed with the Southern California Saxophone Band on May 29, 1923 (see fig. 8 below). The concert was broadcast at the Earl Anthony Radio Station and not KHJ.<sup>12</sup> There is no other mention of this performance so it is difficult to find more information, but it is worth noting that a few days later, on June 2, Gurewich performed on KHJ with Thompson and dedicated his song, "Kathryne" to her.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Seventy Saxophones Wail, Moan Together," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1921, II8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> "Saxophone Band to be Featured on KHJ Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1923, II2.

<sup>11</sup> "Saxophones 'Go on Air,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1923, II3.

<sup>12</sup> "Display Ad 127," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1923, II2.

<sup>13</sup> Ben A. Markson, "Historic Wood Hums for KHJ," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1923, II6.

**Hear Gurewich by Radio  
Tonight**



**JASCHA GUREWICH**  
*"Master of the Saxophone"*  
 plays as soloist with the Southern California Saxophone Band, directed by Dwight McCaughey. Kathryn Thompson, well-known saxophone teacher, also will be heard with this musical aggregation.

**BUESCHER**  
*True-Tone Saxophones*  
 will be used exclusively.

Listen in tonight between 10 and 11 o'clock and get some exhilarating music from Earl Anthony's Radio Station. Buescher True-Tone Saxophones are obtainable here on our "Liberal Terms" Plan.

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MUSIC COMPANY**  
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Other Stores: Long Beach—Riverside—San Diego

Fig. 9. Advertisement of the Southern California Saxophone Band with Jascha Gurewich along with Kathryn Thompson. Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1923. Pg. II2.

By November, 1923, Kathryn assumed leadership of the Southern California Saxophone Band and the personnel increased to 75 members.<sup>14</sup> The saxophone band also performed for some of its largest crowds. On February 17, 1924, the Southern California Saxophone Band was the featured ensemble at a free barbeque in honor of KHJ sponsored by Edward A. Salisbury, millionaire lecturer and traveler, and held at his estate. Over 60,000 people attend the picnic,

<sup>14</sup> "Broadcast," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1924, A8.

with the Southern California Saxophone Band and the 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry Band as the featured entertainment.<sup>15</sup>



*Southern California Saxophone Band, Kathryn Thompson, Director*

## Radio Invitation for You

Here's joyous news! You can join this lively band "on the air"

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*Pianos, Phonographs, Musical Merchandise, Radiophones at prices to suit every home.*

Fig. 10. Advertisement of the Southern California Saxophone Band with Thompson as the leader. Los Angeles Times, Feb. 24, 1924. Pg. A2.

Thompson not only expanded the number of saxophonist in the band; under her direction the band's popularity grew. Over 300 letters from all over the country requested that they play one song, "The World is Waiting for a Sunrise," during a KHJ broadcast.<sup>16</sup> The band's last performance on January 17, 1925 was equally popular; the radio station received 150 telegrams,

<sup>15</sup> "Where Barbecue, Beans, and Beneficence Broadcast Joy to Thousands at Gigantic KHJ Radio Fans' Fete," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1924, A1.

<sup>16</sup> "Broadcast," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1924, A8.

including one from Paris, France, professing their love of the saxophone band.<sup>17</sup> The ensemble disbanded under unknown circumstances. One possible explanation is a change in the Federal Trade Commission in 1925. Previously, instrument manufacturers could give or lend instruments to professional musicians. The board came to the conclusion that this was an unfair and unethical practice because it manipulated the public's opinion of an instrument, creating the impression that a musician was endorsing an instrument because it's the best, not because they just got it for free.<sup>18</sup> Since the band was sponsored by Southern California Music Company, it would have been a violation of the Federal Trade Commission ruling to continue sponsorship if the music store was providing saxophones to the band members.

The band had a diverse repertoire consisting of marches, overtures, popular vocal selections, arrangements of saxophone solos, and original pieces written for the band, like "Porter's Catalina Band" a march by Dwight McCaughey, and "The Dawn of Peace," a march by Lewis D'Ippolito.<sup>19</sup> Thompson and Lillian Althouse also arranged their music for the band. Thompson's pieces included "Valse Caprice," with Thompson as the soloist and "Waiting for You," with Lenor Killian as the vocal soloist.<sup>20</sup> Lillian Althouse arranged her saxophone solo, "Memories," for the band with Althouse as the soloist.<sup>21</sup> Ed Barroll's "Piggly Wiggle" was also arranged for the band, with Thompson as the featured soloist.<sup>22</sup>

The orchestra and band transcriptions included overtures and popular works from operas, marches, and popular dance music. Among the marches were "Our Defenders" by Roldan Seitz

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<sup>17</sup> Claire Forbes Crane, "Saxophone Band Pleases," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925, B8.

<sup>18</sup> Frederic J. Haskin, "Dealers Taboo Gift Practice," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1925, 5.

<sup>19</sup> "'Times' Family Dance," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1922, II9; Claire Forbes Crane, "Saxophone Band Pleases," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925, B8.

<sup>20</sup> Ben Markson, "KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3; Claire Forbes Crane, "Saxophone Band Pleases," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925, B8.

<sup>21</sup> Claire Forbes Crane, "Saxophone Band Pleases," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925, B8.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Markson, "KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3.

and “From Tropic to Tropic” by Russell Alexander.<sup>23</sup> The overtures and opera works included “Poet and Peasant” overture by Franz von Suppe (1846); a selection from *Woodland*, a 1904 operetta by Gustav Luders; “Musettz’s Waltz” from Puccini’s *La Boheme* with Thompson as the soloist; and “Anvil Chorus” from Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*.<sup>24</sup> The dance numbers the band played include “Manana” a Chilean Dance written by Jean M. Missud (1888) and “Kiss Mama Kiss Papa” a foxtrot written by George Fairman in 1922.<sup>25</sup>

The last category of music in the band’s repertoire was arrangements of popular vocal selections. The band often performed with a vocalist, either a tenor or a contralto. The pieces performed with the vocalist Arthur Reed include: “Duna” by Josephine McGill (1914); “My Little Wee Hut on the Hill” by Horace Gleeson (1921); “Down in the Forest” from *A Cycle of Life* by Sir Landon Ronald (1906); and “In the Time of Roses” by Louis Reichardt (1811).<sup>26</sup> The band also featured the tenor Albert Bryant on “The Hand of You,” written by Carrie Jacobs-Bond in 1919.<sup>27</sup> The band also played many vocal selections without a vocal soloist, including “Ten-Ten-Tennessee” by George W. Meyer (1923); “Underneath the Mellow Moon” by Wendell W. Hall (1922); and “The World is Waiting for a Sunrise” by Ernest Seitz (1919).<sup>28</sup>

It is under Thompson’s leadership that the band changed the general perception of the saxophone. The initial horror and hatred of the saxophone that was on full display when the band was formed quickly diffused once the critics and public heard the band play. A review of

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<sup>23</sup> “Broadcast,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1924, A8; Ben Markson, “KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3.

<sup>24</sup> “‘Times’ Family Dance,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1922, II9; “Saxophones ‘Go on Air,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1923, II3; Ben Markson, “KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3.

<sup>25</sup> “‘Times’ Family Dance,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1922, II9; Ben Markson, “KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3.

<sup>26</sup> “Saxophones ‘Go on Air,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1923, II3.

<sup>27</sup> Claire Forbes Crane, “Champion Band to Render Radio Concert,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1924, A10.

<sup>28</sup> Ben Markson, “KHJ Reviewed by Polywinkle,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1923, II3; “Broadcast,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1924, A8.

one performance says “The saxophone is the true instrument of this era, and no greater exponents could be found than the Southern California Saxophone Band. Beautiful smooth tone, peppy rhythms, and faultless pitch distinguish all the members.”<sup>29</sup> As important Thompson was as a soloist and teacher, her work as the leader of this organization helped change the public’s perception from a horn that could only “honk” or “wail” to an actual musical instrument.

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<sup>29</sup> Claire Forbes Crane. “Saxophone is Ruler of Air,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1924, A10.



## Chapter V

### *The Ragtime Saxophonist*

Kathryne Thompson wrote three method books in the 1920s: *The Thompson's Progressive Method for the Saxophone*, *Practical Studies in Bass Clef*, and *The Ragtime Saxophonist*. *The Ragtime Saxophonist* was published in 1920 as a supplemental book for saxophonists who want to learn how to “rag.” This was the first saxophone method to cover ragging, a practice that takes a melody and adds harmonic and melodic interests by adding new rhythms and harmonies. This practice can easily be seen as a fundamental element jazz, and based on the models in the manual and its emphasis on using the given harmony to add melodic complexity, I argue that the *Ragtime Saxophonist* is the first jazz method for the saxophone.

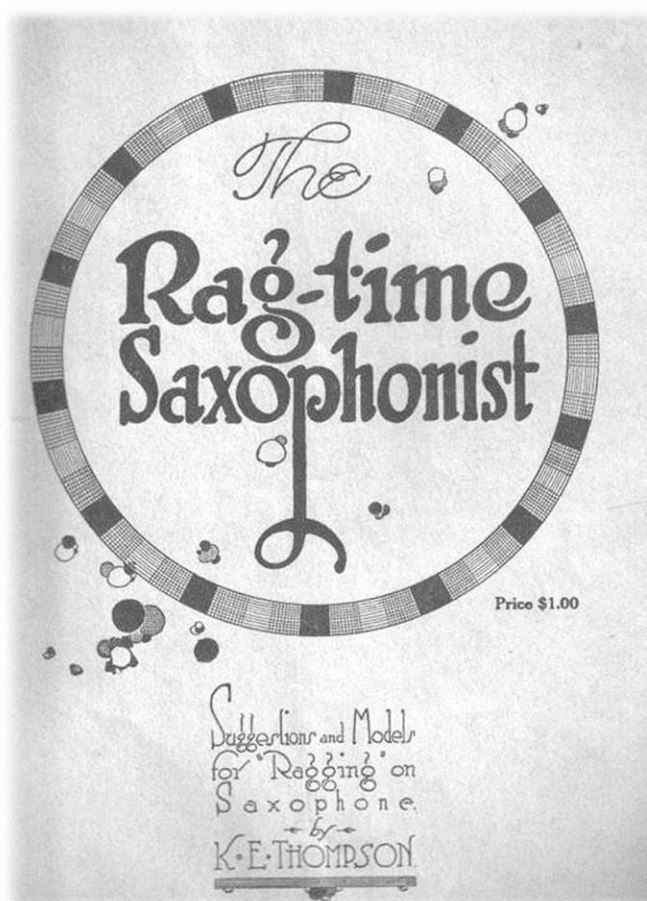


Fig. 11. Cover of the *Ragtime Saxophonist*. Kathryne Thompson (Los Angeles: Kathryne E. Thompson, 1920).

Before the methods for ragging can be explained, Kathryn Thompson's view on jazz has to be examined to understand her insistence on the difference between rag and jazz, which was not entirely clear in 1920. In 1922, Kathryn gave an interview to *Jacob's Band Monthly* where she goes into great detail on her thoughts about jazz music:

And now you ask me, 'What of jazz?' you, who know that I have played and do play ragtime, will maybe wonder at what I've just said. But when I refer to ragtime I do not mean this despicable style so commonly used by the raw recruit, who is able to 'get by' because he can twist around on one foot and 'honk' a few wavy accordion-pleated tones that sound more like a bleating lamb than a musical instrument. If I thought for one single second that his sourtone [sic], out-of-tune, raucous, bilious-sounding saxophone playing were anything but a process of infantile development, I assuredly would sell my saxophone at once and become a nice lady butcher, for I am heart-sick of running that type of pupil through the verbal 'meat-grinder' here in my studio.

In every art there must be an element of commercialism. Of course ragtime is jazz to the well-schooled, artist-musician. However, in other lines I know a high-class jeweler who advertises 'diamond-bar pins, collar pins, steel dressmaker's pins and safety pins!' And he sells them, too! What is that but 'jazz' in the jewelry business? I also know a very wonderful saxophone player, a man at the very top of the list in his profession, who wouldn't play jazz-but believe me, Oliver, he TALKS it! For what is slang but jazz-speech? We poor humans need a little of it, though, to make our ideas carry to the average individual.<sup>1</sup>

What is especially ironic is that Kathryn's book, *The Ragtime Saxophonist* was advertised in *Jacob's Band Monthly* under the title, "Learn to play Jazz."<sup>2</sup> (see fig. 12) In the same publication where she states her views on jazz and ragtime as "infantile development," her book is being promoted as a jazz method.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Barroll, "Saxophone Hall of Fame," *Jacobs Band Monthly* (Boston, MA, August 1922) 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Jacobs' Band Monthly*, v. 6, n. 12, December, 1921, 75.

**The Rag-time Saxophonist**

Learn to **Jazz** on the **SAXOPHONE**

A complete method on ragging the Saxophone explains by new system of models how to fill in sustained notes, how to play variations, etc.

Thompson's Simplified Chart of Fingering also included in this book. **ORDER NOW.**

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*K.E. Thompson*

Fig. 12. Advertisement for *The Ragtime Saxophonist* in *Jacobs Band Monthly*, v. 6, n. 12, Dec. 1921, 75.

Kathryne's opinion of jazz music is a very popular notion of jazz at this time period. In 1920, most jazz soloists did not improvise a new melody, but "rephrased the melody in his own terms."<sup>3</sup> The manipulation of tone was one of the established ways to "jazz" a piece. The "jazz" elements included in one saxophone method, the *F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method*, include slap tonguing, laughing, flutter tonguing, talking, use of vibrato and glissando or sliding.<sup>4</sup> Other jazz practices covered in *Winn's How to Rag and Jazz* are moaning, crying, barking, and yelping.<sup>5</sup> These elements fit into the definition of jazz at the time, as jazz was something you did to a melody, not necessarily a genre of music. The art of improvisation based solely on the harmony was not the defining characteristic of jazz music. Many of these jazz

<sup>3</sup> Reid Badger. *A Life in Ragtime, a Biography of James Reese Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 210.

<sup>4</sup> *The F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method*. (Chicago: Finner & Urbanek, 1925) 23.

<sup>5</sup> Edward R. Winn. *Winn's How to Rag and Jazz on the Saxophone*. (Winn School of Popular Music, 1923) 25-26.

methods from the early 1920s do not actually discuss improvisation but focus on ways to manipulate tone production. For Thompson, this was offensive, but the element of ragging was a developed practice which is respectable to play. In actuality, there is very little difference between ragging and jazzing a melody. They are both based on providing a new musical interpretation of an existing melody.

Thompson draws a line between ragging and jazzing; ragging is something you do with the melody and harmony, while jazzing is something you do to the tone. In her book, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, the models demonstrate ways to manipulate a melody using rhythm, harmony, and passing tones. Manipulating tone production is not covered in her method. So how is it that despite Kathryn's views on jazz, she ended up writing the first jazz method for the saxophone?

The amount of saxophone music at this time was still very limited. Saxophonists often made up for the lack of repertoire by playing from a piano score. Playing just the melody which consists of half notes and quarter notes after a while could be boring, so instrumentalists found ways to expand on the melody. In *The Ragtime Saxophonist* Thompson suggests using the piano accompaniment as a harmonic guide for adding chord tones to the melody.<sup>6</sup> For Thompson, these models should only be used for playing orchestral music or the upper line of a popular song.<sup>7</sup> What makes the *Ragtime Saxophonist* unique from all of the other jazz methods of the time is that the *Ragtime Saxophonist* is supplemental material, not a book on how to play the saxophone. This book is a "method of beginning for those desiring to play popular song and dance music in the style that is now demanded."<sup>8</sup> Thompson expects the saxophonist to know how to play the instrument, and she begins the method by spelling out major tonic and dominant

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<sup>6</sup> K.E. Thompson *The Ragtime Saxophonist*. (Los Angeles: Kathryn E. Thompson, 1920) 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

broken chords. The importance of learning how to play in every key is not just limited to scales but the models given, as stated in the introduction, “each model should be practiced in *every* key, and the entire range in that key.”<sup>9</sup> The models for ragging are as follows:

### 1. Chromatic Runs

Ex. 2: Chromatic Runs, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 6

6

### Chromatic Runs

Chromatic Runs ending on first beat of second measure.

Even 8ths (Ascending) (Descending)

Triplets ending on same note as first an octave higher or lower.

Skip of an octave.

Five notes up or down and back.

These runs may be used to fill in any measure where a note is held over until the first beat of the second measure. See Examples.

Example

Ex.

Ex.

### 2. Models of Time: Doubling (diminution), Ex. 3, and Syncopation, Ex. 4.

Ex. 3: Doubling, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 7

Notice in doubling the quarters into 8ths that the last three notes of the measure are always a repetition of the last three of the four quarters. The first note of the four is never repeated except in even eighths. Models 3 and 4 are most effective.

Now apply above models to all scales in the following way—continue all exercises to high C and down.

Ascending

Descending

Ascending Even Eighths

Model 1.

Model 2.

Model 3.

Model 4.

Descending

Model 1.

Model 2.

Model 3.

Model 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Ex. 4: Syncopation, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 8

Examples of changing four even notes into various forms of syncopation.

*etc.*

*Examples*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

### 3. Passing Notes

Ex. 5: Passing Notes, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 9

**Passing Notes** 9

Scale Notes.

*Ascending* *Descending*

Scale exercise using half tone below each main note.

Half tone above each main note.

In groups of 16<sup>th</sup> notes.

C D E F C B A G

#### 4. Broken Chords

Ex. 6: Broken Chords, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 13

Broken chords used in any position are very effective just doubled in even time.



Select a popular song in  $\frac{4}{4}$  time—in any key and break up chords in preceding ways.

*Example—Piano part*



May be broken up thus



or using chord notes and passing notes.



Broken chords starting on an after beat (or a half count after main count) are good.



*Piano part—chords*



*May be played*



*May be played*

*May be played*

Each of these models is written in the key of C for the saxophonist to practice and transpose to the other keys. There are also two pages on how to transpose. The very last page contains an eight bar melody of the popular Harold Carroll song, “I’m Always Chasing Rainbows” which was written in 1917, along with three examples of how to rag the melody which are shown in Ex.

7.

Ex. 7: Last page, *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, pg. 16

16

## Melody

and variations showing some uses for previous models.



The following examples will show how the preceding models may be applied to the above melody. Endless variations may be made but these merely show how the models given in this book may be used. Do not play variations continuously—they are tiresome. Revert back to the melody frequently. These have merely been put closely together to show how each measure may be “filled in” in various ways.

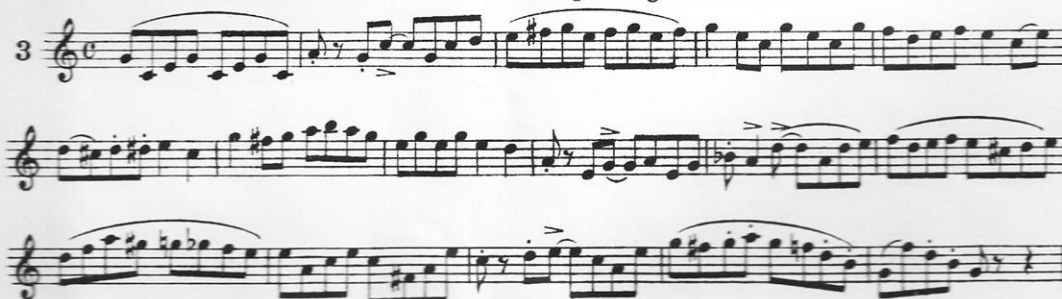
### Example



Using almost entirely Chromatic No 4 and Model No 3 for doubling four even notes.



Broken Chords—chromatic runs—intervals and passing notes in various models of time.





Since this book was published in 1920, it preceded the saxophone craze that began in 1921. By 1922, saxophone method books begin to appear on the market to capitalize on the craze. Many of these books were written for the sole purpose of teaching beginners how to play jazz. These books are different from *The Ragtime Saxophonist* in trying to be both a beginner's manual and a jazz manual at the same time. For example, in *Winn's How to Rag and Jazz on the Saxophone*, Winn begins with the basics of how to play the saxophone and covers reading rhythms and notes in just two pages. By the tenth page he is introducing jazz arrangements of popular tunes. Skipping the basics necessary to play the saxophone, like tonguing, breathing, and a good command of the technical aspects and attempting to teach those skills along with how to rag a melody would probably have produced poor results. While Thompson provides each model of ragging in terms of how to manipulate the melody, Winn's model simply puts all four together at the same time.

Another saxophone jazz method published in 1925, *The F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method*, is similar to Winn's book in trying to teach a beginner how to play the saxophone and how to play jazz at the same time. While devoting a few more pages to learning notes and rhythms, the method then delves into "Thirty One Progressive Models in Hot Jazz Playing."<sup>10</sup> These are also based on the elements of ragging that Thompson establishes in *The Ragtime Saxophonist*, but once again are not explained to the student. The first models in the key of C major focus on syncopation, then adding thirds, broken chords, and finally half-step passing tones. These exercises continue, progressing in rhythmic complexity through the keys of G, F, Bb, Eb, and D. After the exercise, there are eight "hot" choruses that are 16 bars long and one 32 bar chorus for the keys of F, Bb, D, A, Ab, and G. Practicing these choruses is more likely to provide the saxophonist material for soloing in popular music. The choruses are then

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<sup>10</sup>*The F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method*. (Chicago: Finder & Urbanek, 1925) 14.

followed by two bar novelty breaks in the major keys and dominant chords of C, G, D, F, Bb, Eb, and Ab. The nature of the *F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method* is not so much a method to teach the saxophonist how to play jazz or ragtime, but rather, provides saxophonists solos or breaks to memorize. Both *Winn's How to Rag and Jazz on the Saxophone* and the *F and U Popular Jazz Saxophone Method* built on models Thompson established in the *Ragtime Saxophonist*, but they both forgo Thompson's initial advice that these models are only successful if practiced in every key.

It is difficult to assess the influence the *Ragtime Saxophonist*. It was advertised to a national audience, so it is possible it was used by many saxophonists. Since it was not a beginning method book, its impact may have been limited at the start of the saxophone craze, since knowing how to play the saxophone was a prerequisite for using the book. The volume was popular in Los Angeles and was even advertised as a method used at the Winn-Kearney Studio of Popular Music.<sup>11</sup>

**Popular Music and Ragtime Taught in 10 to 20 Lessons**  
**BEGINNERS OR ADVANCED PUPILS**  
 We Quickly Teach You to Play the Way You Want—in Snappy Ragtime

**Saxophone** THOMPSON RAGTIME METHOD **Violin Banjo Piano** WINN METHOD: DOUBLE AND DISCORD BASS

The Thompson Ragtime Method for Saxophone teaches you to fill in and rag any melody at sight, in a most effective manner.

The Winn Method for Piano enables you to easily use the full and correct Bass, so effective in popular music and ragtime.

**WINN-KEARNEY STUDIO OF POPULAR MUSIC**  
**1418 S. Hill St. Main 1060**

Get Our Free Advice Before buying a Saxophone

If You Have a Piano Why Not Learn to Play It?

Branch Studio No. 2—6019 Hollywood Blvd. Tel. Holly 364.  
 Studio No. 3—3011 South Hoover St., Los Angeles.

Winn Books for sale at all Music Stores Successful Instruction for Out-of-Town Pupils by Mail.

Fig. 12. Advertisement for the Winn-Kearney Studio of Popular Music. The left side of the advertisement covers the “Thompson Ragtime Method” for the saxophone. Los Angeles Times, July 2, 1922. Pg. II7.

<sup>11</sup> “Display Ad 75-No Title,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1922, II7.

## Conclusion

Kathryne Thompson's work in the 1920s from teaching, performing, composing, and directing a saxophone band are quite impressive, but that is not the end of her influence.

Kathryne Thompson went on to write a band method book with her husband, Lewis D'Ippolito, *Modern Way Method for Band and Orchestra*, which was published by Volkwein Bros. Inc. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Volkwein Bros. also reprinted the *Thompson Progressive Method for the Saxophone*. Additionally, Thompson worked with Freddie Martin, a popular saxophonist in the 1940s on his method, *Freddie Martin's Saxophone Technique*.<sup>1</sup> In 1957, Kathryne Thompson D'Ippolito passes away at the age of 68.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to this investigation, there was very little accessible information on Kathryne Thompson. Other than a paragraph here and there in various dissertations and articles, her life as a teacher or performer was fairly unknown. What has been written about her is either incorrect or puts too much of an emphasis on the novelty of her students. Her work as a teacher and a saxophonist helped promote the saxophone in the Los Angeles region and she helped to elevate the saxophone to a respectable instrument. She also promoted the works of other female musicians and composers by featuring them on her radio show. There is still a great need for more research into women saxophonist of this period. The following statement gives a glimpse into early twentieth century and the gender assigned to each instrument.

Certain musical instruments are used almost entirely by one sex, others by both. The harp is largely a woman's instrument, but when men do take it up they show marked ability to master it. The piano is very evenly divided between the sexes. Brass instruments are played mainly by men, ukuleles by women. The banjo is a man's instrument, while mandolins are well divided between the

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<sup>1</sup> Holly J. Hubbs, *American Women Saxophonist from 1870-1930, their careers and repertoire*. (D.M. diss., Ball State University, 2003) 78.

<sup>2</sup> "Obituary," *LA Times*, July 12, 1957, B6.

sexes. The saxophone, the most popular of all instruments at the present time, is played by both men and women.<sup>3</sup>

While it is easy to marginalize women saxophonists as a mere novelties during the early twentieth century, to do so is to ignore their contributions to the instrument. In the 1920s, a woman saxophonist was not a novelty, but a rather common occurrence. This research helps to demonstrate that one woman in particular, Kathryne Thompson, was an influential saxophonist in Los Angeles who not only wrote a popular method book, but also was the first saxophonist to write a volume on how to play jazz.



Fig. 13, Kathryne Thompson on the cover of Felix Arndt's *Nola* (New York: Sam Fox Publishing Company, 1924)

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<sup>3</sup> John Howe. "Musical Instruments." *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1924, A9.

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