

*The Turn of the Century Minstrels performing The Roots of American Jazz* was born from an idea for the New York Repertory Company. We were in residence at Gil Weist's Michael's Pub. Mr. Weist asked if I could put together a small musical unit similar to what had been used for afternoon tea dances in the early 1900s. They were known as tea dance orchestras.

I went to the great musical historian Vince Giordano. He allowed me to dig through many very early orchestrations he had in file drawers in his basement. These were from around the 1890s to 1921. I found most of the material I was looking for. It included waltzes, tangos, marches, ragtime, early jazz and blues pieces and anything in the way of novelties.

I put together a group of musicians to perform in this style. The group consisted of Peter Ecklund on cornet and Orange Kellin on clarinet. Then I looked around for multi-instrumentalists who could give me those extra colors of that period. Steve Hansen who now plays string bass around San Francisco was living in New York back then; so I used him on flute, trombone, tuba, euphonium and harmonica. Steve introduced me to the great J.J. Silva who joined us on trumpet, trombone, euphonium, alto sax, flute and piccolo. Cynthia Sayer was added to this on plectrum banjo, piano, drums, xylophone and vocals. I played string bass, drums, tenor banjo and sang.

The show ran an astounding ten weeks at the Pub. Critics and folks from the classical world loved us. Along the way another century passed and the name became confusing; so, once again Todd Robbins was called on for a name and *The Turn of the Century Minstrels* became *The Early Tin Pan Alley Orchestra*.