

For Reggie Cabral, Provincetown memories are full of jazz

By MARY KLEIN

PROVINCETOWN — This article is the second to originate from a "Living History" series which was done last winter by the Provincetown City Spirit Bicentennial project in conjunction with the local library and the former Alternative restaurant which donated the space.

City Spirit staff members contacted several older Provincetown citizens and invited them to talk informally before a small group of people about their lives and Provincetown.

One of the persons who volunteered to prepare a talk and share his experience with the group was Reggie Cabral, a native of Provincetown and the owner of the Atlantic House bar.

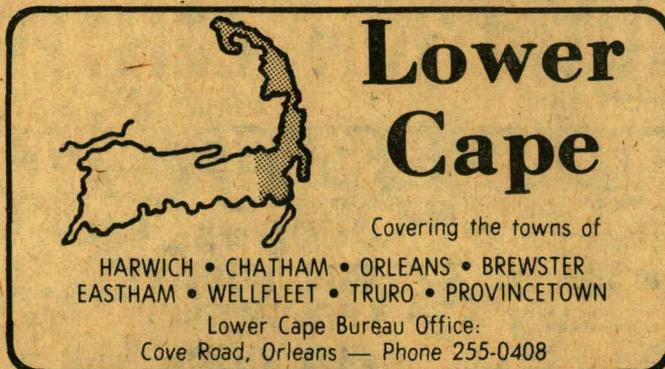
In his part of the series, Cabral pulled into focus the art and music world that put Provincetown on the map as an artists' and musicians' haven by the sea.

Cabral, who bought the Atlantic House in 1949, vividly recalled the great entertainers who once performed there.

The following is a small section of his story, and this part begins in the late 1940's:

Tennessee Williams (who visited Provincetown frequently) was very friendly with Stella Brooks. And Stella was a marvelous performer. She was a very irrational person but a marvelous performer. Stella Brooks had a way about her. She had this air about her that she was slightly above everyone else. Go into a room to hear her perform and you had to listen or she wouldn't perform. Tennessee Williams called her one of the greatest jazz singers ever. I would go along with that completely.

One night we were all sitting at a table in the A-House listening to Stella who always closed her show with what they called the Blues. It was really the beginning of what you could call contemporary jazz.



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Tennessee, who always had a piece of paper, a little pad and pencil, wrote on the paper. Later he came over and sat at the table. She liked the lyrics and I remember them very well.

"Your eyes are lighted windows, there's a party going on inside. Your mouth's a roller coaster and baby, I'm about to take a ride."

He wrote that just for Stella Brooks. Well, the next night sure enough, Stella, at the end of her show with the lyrics that Tennessee Williams wrote, sang them.

She played the Atlantic House for a long time. She played one whole season there. She was funky. She was marvelous.

Miss Stella Brooks, her name keeps coming up. When we opened the Carriage Room I wanted her to open it. Some people were making too much noise and she tiptoed over and took two bottles of beer from the tops of the tables and poured them over the heads of the people downstairs. You should read Tennessee Williams. You'd get a great idea of what Stella Brooks was like.

Moving into the early 1950's era, Cabral talks about another great singer.

Now I think you all know the great Lady Day, Billie Holiday. She played two engagements in Provincetown. Her last professional engagement was played at the Atlantic House.

I remember vividly the last time Billie came down the alley in a huge, black chauffeur-driven limousine which belonged to the Associated Artist Productions. She came heavily guarded. She was surrounded by people. She was heavy merchandise. I mean even though she couldn't perform publicly in the city of New York she was very valuable property because her records always sold.

When she got out of the car, that was a nightmare in itself. You talk about taking a bad trip, that was really a bad trip. To begin with, all of her gowns were thrown over one arm. She had her shoes and her makeup, her personal things in a paper bag. The first thing that she wanted was a bottle of gin. When she said she wanted a bottle gin, she wanted a bottle of gin.

That night before Billie went on stage, all of a sudden she got hungry and she looked at my partner who was Frank Hurst and said, "Baby, I'll have a pork chop sandwich and I want it right now." And she lifted up her dress and took out two one hundred dollar bills and gave them to Frank.

We finally got her on stage and what was unbelievable was her drawing capacity. She outdrew anybody who ever played the Atlantic House and we had paid her the least of what we paid anyone of any known status.

I never could quite communicate with Billie and

neither could anyone else. She lived in room eight which is right across the bath and she always had her door open. She had two trained chihuahuas. And those dogs were very vicious. They were there to protect her and they did protect her.

I remember distinctly there was a Coleman burner in her room and I'd see her heavy curling iron over this burner. It would be red hot. Oh my God, you'd think that it would burn the hair right off her head. But no way. No way. When she got on stage she was absolutely glamorous.

I was kind of delighted when her engagement was over because at the end I really couldn't take it.

But Billie had a nice disposition. I think she'd been terribly hurt. I think she felt alone. She was terribly unsure of herself until she sang.

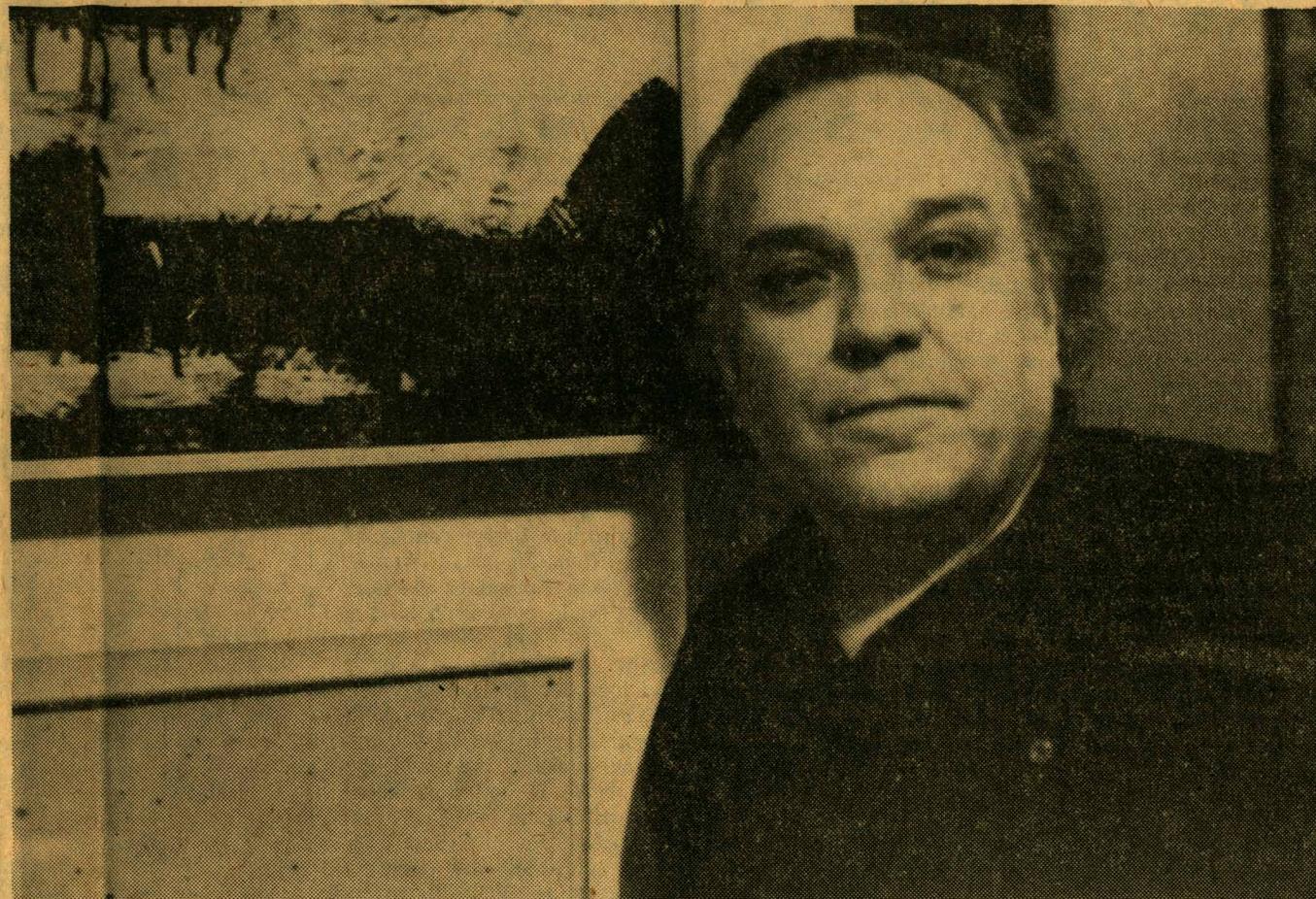
In the late 1950s a then-unknown personality drifted into Provincetown seeking the beginnings of her fame and fortune, Cabral explained.

I do remember and remember very well, a girl who I would not hire, who bothered me, who was a drag, who later became a superstar, Barbra Streisand.

There's a fellow right here in Provincetown now, Angelo, who is a cook. He can tell you some very funny stories about Barbra Streisand. She was always there because she was always looking for that break. She was always there in case somebody got sick and couldn't show and she was there to be on stage.

She was very kooky. Everybody called her kooky. She did actually wear antique dresses and she wore strange things before they became so-called hippie today. She had them back then.

One day I went backstage to see Angelo. He had just caught Barbra Streisand stealing turkey, his turkey, from the refrigerator. He was chasing her around with a knife.



(Staff Photo by Mary Klein)

Atlantic House owner Reggie Cabral recalls the days when the bar resounded with the music of jazz giants.

It goes to prove that there are these acts that have a certain something. It doesn't blossom all at once, but sooner or later it comes out. She had one of the acts that did turn her into a superstar, and I would say truthfully that when I hear her records today, they really are marvelous.

Then we go into the 60's, Cabral continued.

The 60's were kind of funny years because that was the jazz era. That's when they got very heavily interested in jazz. Entertainment was out. Really out. People were very interested in jazz. Jazz was in.

We opened the jazz room in the Atlantic House and we changed its name from the Cabaret Room to the Big Room and we opened with Zoot Sims and Al Syms.

Miles Davis also played in the room. The great Miles Davis came in the room and saw Tony Williams. That was kind of the end of Tony Williams. That kind of loused up the program.

But I think another particular picture here will mean a lot to you. That is the great Gerry Mulligan. That's Gerry Mulligan on stage at the Atlantic House. When Gerry Mulligan played he certainly knew what he was doing.

He was under contract to the record companies and we were never allowed to use his name publicly. How we got around that was that he sent us tons of record albums and we plastered them all over the front of the Big Room and we also had signs going into the room itself.

He was sensational. He got

so inspired by the audience, and they were so receptive, that he would go out into the audience and play. He'd step on the chair and he'd finish on the table and he'd really blow his heart out.

A funny thing about it all is that you'd be at the door and people would say "Jesus, that sounds just like Gerry Mulligan in there."

Mulligan was never married to Judy Holliday. He lived with Judy Holliday. He came to Provincetown two or three times and he played at the Atlantic House on different occasions.

I knew Judy Holliday, met her. They lived at Sandbar Village. Technically, he lived upstairs and she lived down below.

Judy Holliday was quite a star in her day and great com-

edienne who did many, many things. She was a marvelous, marvelous person. At that time she was already dying of cancer and she spent most of her time on the little deck in front of the place.

She very rarely went out. She didn't want to be seen by the public. She was already losing weight very rapidly. A delightful person and she was always witty. She was funny. She never was down when she was dying.

She and Gerry Mulligan lived together and every time they were in Provincetown, they were together. But we kind of try to keep that away from the general public. Celebrities, really very few of them unless they are hams, like to be bothered.