



Trombonist (1906 - 1993)

Leon "Pee Wee" Whittaker was born an only child to Kizzie and Tom Whittaker in Newellton, Louisiana circa 1906. When Pee Wee was a young boy his family moved into the city. After his parents separated, he was raised mostly by his mother, Kizzie. Pee Wee remembers his mother's musical ability to play "most anything". Mrs. Whittaker took Pee Wee on tour with her until he was old enough to go to school.

Pee Wee lived with his maternal grandfather, who played the violin, during the academic year. He studied with a Professor Smith who would visit from Alcorn College in Mississippi. His instruction included reading music and playing various instruments such as the clarinet, trombone, guitar, string bass, and mandolin.

Between 1917 and 1918, Pee Wee's family moved further up the Mississippi River into Lake Village, Arkansas. His mother left her musical career to become a Missionary Baptist preacher. When he finished school, Pee Wee joined his family's band, playing the mandolin. A friend and school mate of Pee Wee's (Louis Jordan) later went on to become a famous saxophone player, singer, songwriter, and band leader. Sometimes Pee Wee and Louis Jordan would run off and join a traveling minstrel show, particularly F.S. Wolcott's Rabbit's Foot Minstrels.

Pee Wee's family moved once more to Greenville, Mississippi. Not long after, Pee Wee began playing string bass in a band led by Trombonist Tullus Washington. Around 1925, the Washington family moved to Chicago and the band broke up. About two years later, Pee Wee joined Harry Walker's band. He left town with the band and didn't come home for seven or eight years. The band traveled throughout Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi.

Pee Wee left Henry Walker around 1935 and hitchhiked to Monroe, Louisiana. There he joined the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, touring up and down the Mississippi River. He played in the band for nearly fifteen years. By the early 1950's, the music industry became increasingly difficult. Pee Wee began looking for a home base and finally settled in El Dorado, Arkansas. There he formed a band that played small circuits.

In 1954, Pee Wee moved to Ferriday, Louisiana. Pee Wee brought his whole band, and they soon landed two great gigs. From 1955 to 1963, Pee Wee received the opportunity to play with Doc Morris and his band associated with a small circus out of Michigan, traveling all over Canada and England! However, in his sixth year Pee Wee grew tired of the road and went home to Ferriday. He retired around 1963 and was inducted into the Hall of Master Folk Artists in 1982.

Pee Wee Whittaker passed away at the age of 87. Along with Jerry Lee Lewis, Jimmy Swaggart, and Mickey Gilley, jazz/blues/rock trombonist Leon "Pee Wee" Whittaker was among the initial inductees into the Delta Music Museum and Hall of Fame in Ferriday, Louisiana in March, 2002. His widow and son were on hand to receive his award.