

The American Folklife Center and the Music Division of the Library of Congress  
In partnership with the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage  
present

# MR. JELLY ROLL, MR. LOMAX, AND THE INVENTION OF JAZZ

INAUGURATING THE SYMPOSIUM

THE LOMAX LEGACY: FOLKLORE IN A GLOBALIZING CENTURY



A CONCERT AND LECTURE  
FEATURING  
DAVE BURRELL, JAZZ PIANIST  
AND JOHN SZWED,  
JAZZ SCHOLAR, YALE PROFESSOR  
AND ALAN LOMAX BIOGRAPHER  
PROGRAM INTRODUCTION BY ROB BAMBERGER

**Wednesday**  
**January 18, 2006**  
**12 NOON - 1 PM**  
**Coolidge Auditorium**  
**Ground Floor, Thomas Jefferson Building**  
**Library of Congress**  
**10 First Street, SE**  
**Washington, DC**

FREE AND OPEN  
TO THE PUBLIC

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# MR. JELLY ROLL, MR. LOMAX, AND THE INVENTION OF JAZZ

In the spring and summer of 1938, 23-year-old Alan Lomax, Assistant-in-Charge of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, recorded over nine hours of the singing, playing and boasting of Ferdinand Joseph Lamothe, AKA Jelly Roll Morton (1885-1941), the New Orleans-born, self-styled originator of Jazz. Now, Rounder Records has released *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, the first-ever uncut, unexpurgated, chronologically sequenced edition of these recordings. The piano-shaped, eight-CD box set, part of Rounder's *Alan Lomax Collection* series, features cover art by Robert Crumb, a bonus disc drawn from Lomax's 1949 interviews with Morton's peers, Lomax's Morton biography *Mister Jelly Roll*, and an eighty-page essay on Morton by Lomax biographer John Szwed. The box set has been nominated for two 2005 Grammy awards, including one for Szwed's liner notes.

Szwed relates that, in 1938, Alistair Cooke of the BBC told Lomax to seek out Morton at the Music Box, a small Washington, DC, night club where he occasionally played piano and regaled local devotees with tales of his glory days. There Morton would also expound his strong views on the history of jazz, which he claimed to have invented in 1902, and which, he felt, few musicians born outside of New Orleans played well. Years later, Lomax credited him with the idea of a Library of Congress recording session.

Lomax recalled the story in more detail in 1978: "He was thoroughly prepared. He'd thought about the whole thing. And we had a few minutes' conversation and I knew I had a winner and I had my own plot and I knew he had his plot and I ran up the Coolidge Auditorium stairs to Harold [Spivacke - head of the Library's Music Division and Lomax's boss] and I said 'Harold, I want to have a guarantee of a hundred discs.' And he said 'What?' and I said 'Yeah—we're going to do the history of New Orleans Jazz!'"

"I decided to see how much folklore Jelly Roll had in him, and that was my plot," Lomax remembered. "And his plot was to make sure that the place of New Orleans in the history of American music would be clearly and forever stated and he did that in a simply brilliant way." Morton's emphasis on the importance of New Orleans in American musical history makes particularly poignant listening after the devastating flooding of the city in 2005. Seated at a grand piano on the stage of the Coolidge Auditorium, Jelly Roll talked, played and sang the story of his life, his music and his home, where, he said "...they played every type of music. Everyone, no doubt, had a different style...they had every class, we had Spanish, we had colored, we had white, we had Frenchmens, we had Americans...we had 'em from all part of the world."

With the piano as his only tool, Morton gave a series of swinging musical lectures on his education and compositional style, which embraced everything from 19th-century opera to the chants he sang as a "spyboy," or scout, for one of the city's Mardi Gras Indian groups. At one point, he broke down the parts

of a highly formal French quadrille, complete with dance calls, and showed how he reconfigured them to create the jazz standard "Tiger Rag." Morton filled disc after disc with blues, ragtime, hymns, stomps and compositions of his own, such as "King Porter Stomp," "The Pearls," "Freakish," "The Crave," and "Pep." Though he had recorded extensively as a bandleader and pianist for commercial labels in the 1920s, Morton was virtually undocumented as a singer prior to his Library of Congress sessions, which showed him to be a fine interpreter of sacred and secular songs. Some of his songs were very secular indeed, with lyrics that still shock.

This event is a very special celebration of Morton's life and work. The American Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which began as the Archive of American Folk Song, a part of the Library's Music Division, in 1928. This event thus recalls Jelly Roll Morton's legacy right where it was created: on the stage of the Coolidge Auditorium, where Morton held forth for Lomax under the auspices of the Music Division and the Folk Archive. The program is the inaugural event of a three-day symposium on the life and work of Alan Lomax, ethnographer, folklorist, musician, and former staff member of the Library of Congress. For more information about the symposium, see <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/lomaxlegacy.html>

Matthew Barton

Dave Burrell has recorded with Archie Shepp, David Murray, Pharoah Sanders and many others, and has released more than twenty albums as a soloist and leader, including *Jelly Roll Joys* (Gazell Records 4003), a solo piano tribute to Jelly Roll Morton released in 1991. Burrell has a website at [www.daveburrell.com](http://www.daveburrell.com)

John Szwed is John M. Musser Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies at Yale University, and Louis Armstrong Professor of Jazz Studies at Columbia University. As a musician, he studied trombone with Donald Reinhart, music theory with Mervin Hutton, and played professionally for twelve years. He is the author of *Space is the Place: Sun Ra's Life on Earth* (1997) and *So What: The Life of Miles Davis* (2002), among other publications, and is currently researching and writing a biography of Alan Lomax. He will discuss Morton's years in Washington, DC, and the enduring influence and legacy of this American original.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival presentation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Visit the AFC on the web at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

