

# Weldon Leo (Jack) Teagarden

*Weldon Leo (Jack) Teagarden, jazz musician, known also as Jackson T., Mr. T, and Big Gate, was born in Vernon, Texas, on August 20, 1905, to Charles and Helen (Geinger) Teagarden. His father, an amateur comet player, worked in the oilfields, and his mother was a local piano instructor and church organist. All four Teagarden children became prominent musicians.*

*Jack was given piano lessons when he reached the age of five. He took up the baritone horn for a time but switched to trombone when he was seven. He and his mother played duets (trombone and piano) as background to the silent films at a Vernon theater. In 1918, after his father's death, the family moved to Chappell, Nebraska, where he and his mother again worked in the local theater. The following year the family moved to Oklahoma City.*

*At sixteen Teagarden first played the trombone professionally, at a concert near San Antonio as a member of Cotton Bailey's dance and jazz band. Later the same year (1921) Teagarden joined Peck Kelley's Bad Boys in Houston. Visiting band leader Paul Whiteman heard the group there and offered Teagarden a position in his New York orchestra. For several years, however, Jack continued to play with local groups.*

*About 1923 he briefly attempted to enter the oilfield business in Wichita Falls but soon gave up the venture and returned to music. Teagarden made his first trip to New York in 1926 as a performer on the eastern tour of Doc Ross's Jazz Bandits. The next year he went to New York on his own. He originally planned to join Whiteman's ensemble but happened to hear Ben Pollack's band first. After two months with the Tommy Gott Orchestra Teagarden secured a position in Pollack's organization, where he beat Glenn Miller for the seat of first trombone. He made his first recording in 1927 as a member of the Kentucky Grasshoppers, an offshoot of Pollack's group. Teagarden later recorded with many of America's jazz greats including Red Nichols, Benny Goodman, and Louis Armstrong. He performed with Eddie Condon, Bix Beidelbecke, Paul Whiteman, the Dorsey brothers, Bob Crosby, Eddie Lang, Peck Kelley, and others.*

*He was considered by many to be the greatest jazz trombonist of his era, but his style was so unusual that others did not follow his example. In 1933, after a brief stint in Mal Hallett's band, he signed on with Paul Whiteman's orchestra for five years. In 1939 Teagarden formed his own band; it was musically innovative but not financially successful and was disbanded in 1947. He teamed up with Louis Armstrong's All-Stars for some classic recordings in the late 1940s and formed the Jack Teagarden All Stars Dixieland band in 1951. The All Stars toured Europe and Asia in 1957-59 as part of a government-sponsored goodwill tour.*

*Jack Teagarden's playing style was lyrical and seemingly effortless. He did not follow the traditional Dixieland "tailgate" treatment of his instrument. Upper register solos, the lack of a strict solo beat, and the use of lip trills were some of his characteristics. Having grown up in an area with a large black population, Teagarden developed an early appreciation of black music, especially the blues and gospel. He was one of the first jazz musicians to incorporate "blue notes" into his playing. He was also among the first white jazz musicians to record with black players.*

*Teagarden was also an excellent singer and developed a respected blues vocal style. In addition, he was an inventor, redesigning mouthpieces, mutes, and watervalves and inventing a new musical slide rule. He also started using Pond's Cold Cream and Pam Cooking lubricant on his trombone. something many trombonists emulated.*

*Teagarden appeared in the movies Birth of the Blues (1941), The Glass Wall (1953), and Jazz on a Summer's Day (1959). He was an admired recording artist, featured on RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca, Capitol, and MGM discs. As a jazz artist he won the 1944 Esquire magazine Gold Award, was highly rated in the Metronome polls of 1937-42 and 1945, and was selected for the Playboy magazine All Star Band, 1957-60.*

*Teagarden was the featured performer at the Newport Jazz Festival of 1957. Saturday Review wrote in 1964 that he "walked with artistic dignity all his life," and the same year Newsweek praised his "mature approach to trombone jazz."*

*Teagarden was married first to Ora Binyon in San Angelo, Texas, in 1923; they had two sons before they were divorced. In the 1930s he was married to and divorced from, successively, Clare Manzi of New York City and Edna "Billie" Coats. Teagarden married Adeline Barriere Gault in September 1942; they had three children of their own and one foster child.*

*Early in 1964 Teagarden cut short a performance in New Orleans because of ill health. He briefly visited a hospital then was found dead in his room at the Prince Monti Motel in New Orleans on January 15. The cause of death was bronchial pneumonia, which had followed a liver ailment. He was buried in Los Angeles.*

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