Who Was Dr. Phil?

Have you ever looked at the brass plaque over the fireplace that honors Phillip Porter and wondered about him? As time passes, fewer and fewer brothers remember his dedication to the brothers of Alpha Chapter for over forty years. But he also found time for his real passion: music. What follows is some background on a very talented musician who was a part of our house from its start until the mid ’50s.

"Doctor" Phil Porter is not a widely known name outside of ragtime playing circles, but was long known to the people of Charlottesville, home of the University of Virginia where he presided for decades in the Chi Phi fraternity house. He did not work long as a professional musician, had many compositions but virtually nothing in print, yet he still provided one of those rare direct glimpses into the original ragtime era long after it had ended. Here is as much his story as we could collect from scant sources. Many references spell his name as Philip, but he signed as Phillip so that is the spelling of record.

Phillip Porter was born in Albemarle County, Virginia, to John Green Porter and Sarah Elizabeth (Lewis) Porter in 1888, the first of ultimately five children born to Lizzie. On draft records he claimed 1887, but birth and other records confirm the correct year. As Phillip was listed as a mulatto on some occasions, there is a slight possibility that his father was also mulatto or light-skinned. Lizzie was born in Virginia in January 1863, so was very possibly born a slave during the last year that status was legally accepted within the United States. At one point, Phillip listed his birthplace as Hillsboro, Virginia, about 115 miles north of Charlottesville in rural Loudoun County. As his birth record indicates Albemarle County, and the births of his two brothers were not registered in Albemarle, he may have lived there as a toddler. As of the 1900 Census the family was living in Charlottesville, Virginia, having likely moved back there in the mid 1890s. John was last listed in the 1895 Charlottesville directory. In 1900 Lizzie was shown as widowed and working as a washer woman. She was also listed as a laundress in the 1898 through 1910 city directories, living at 318 12th Street for most of those years. In addition to Phillip she was supporting his younger brothers Horace H. (12/1891) and William (12/1892). The date or cause of death for John Porter is as of yet unknown.

Growing up in Charlottesville, Porter learned both piano and trombone. As implied in a later interview in the February 1953 edition of The Record Changer magazine, Phil evidently tried

New Chapter Advisor

Please welcome John Harris (’82) as Alpha’s new chapter advisor. John follows the huge footsteps of Owen Parry and Jim Soderquist who have dutifully served Alpha in this capacity for many years. John is fortunate to have the continued support from Owen and Jim as well as a strong group of Active brothers to work with for the coming year.

John and his family, Amy (’82), Caroline (age 15) and James (age 12) moved to Charlottesville in the summer of 2007 and reside in the Ivy area. John is the former Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of the Carlyle Group, a global private equity firm. John currently serves as a Senior Advisor to Carlyle.

John served as Rush Chairman (’80-’81) and as Alpha (’81-’82) during his days at UVA Basketball Game. He can be reached at john.harris@carlyle.com or 434-296-2486.
Alpha Notes
Benjamin Sunshine - Alpha

As we enter into the Spring Semester, changes in the Chi Phi house come full circle. We welcome in a diverse new pledge class of eleven men while we also prepare to send off our 4th years to graduation. We express our gratitude to the out-going executive officers for their service, as a new group of brothers mobilize to take on leadership positions in the house. We bid farewell to our previous chapter adviser, Owen Parry, and extend to him a heartfelt “thank you” for his dedication, support, and guidance over the years. At the same time, we welcome in our new chapter adviser, John Harris, who has gotten to know many of the active brothers already. Amongst all these changes, there are some constants in the Chi Phi house—the brotherhood remains one of the finest, most well rounded, and most cohesive groups at the University. The Chi Phi fraternity continues to produce men of intelligence, personality, and character.

Chi Phi brothers are committed to involving themselves in University affairs and serving the surrounding Charlottesville neighborhood. Individually, we have many brothers that tutor kids at the Charlottesville Boys and Girls Club and we have a number of brothers who serve on the IFC and Student Council. Several brothers this past winter led a 5th grade basketball team to win 3rd place in a local house league tournament. George Lyle, a ROTC member and Hullabahoo singer, was recently awarded a lawn house for the upcoming year. In terms of service efforts undertaken by the entire fraternity, we have a newly established Community Outreach Chairman who is organizing a spring food drive with the Charlottesville Food Bank, and he continues to explore other opportunities for our fraternity to give back to the community.

The Chi Phi brothers are also very active socially and we have many events planned for this spring semester. On Saturday, March 20th, the brothers will be celebrating St. Patrick’s Day at the house with a barbecue outside the house. Just a week later on the 27th, we will be holding our annual Parents Formal, which will be held at James Monroe’s historic Ash Lawn-Highland home this year. This black tie formal is a favorite event of many brothers, as we get to enjoy a sit-down dinner and entertainment with our parents, dates, and other fraternity brothers. We also have our (in)famous Rave party tentatively scheduled for Friday, April 9th and all alumni are encouraged to come back and visit. Otherwise, we hope to see you at Foxfields or the reunion at the house on June 5th.

The most remarkable quality of our active brothers is that we are able to devote so much effort to service and social activities, while still budgeting enough time for our studies. It appears that all of us are excelling in the classroom. In this past semester, active Chi Phi brothers achieved an average GPA of 3.43, which gave us the 4th highest GPA out of 28 total fraternities. We have several Jefferson and Echols scholars among the current brothers that we are very proud of. All in all, Chi Phi is drawing some very talented and well-rounded young men.

As the snowfall from the winter finally begins to melt away, Chi Phi is poised for another successful year under the guidance of our new adviser John Harris. As a chapter, we would like to thank all the alumni for your support and assistance. You are crucial to the growth and continued success of the house. I wish you all the best in 2010.

Chi Phi Reunions Reception
June 5, 2010 | 2-4 p.m. at 161 Rugby Road!
Full Reunions information is online at www.virginiareunions.com

The Alpha Chapter is hosting a cocktail reception at 161 Rugby Road on Saturday, June 5, 2010, from 2 - 4 p.m. Returning Alpha Chapter alumni, spouses and guests, plus local and interested alumni are invited. This party is sponsored by your Alpha Home Association and is FREE to all.
to make a go of it as a professional ragtime pianist, likely between 1904 and 1910. He claimed to have learned it largely from traveling minstrel shows (a group that might include vaudeville troupes and Chataqua performers) as they passed through central Virginia. Other than the University, Charlottesville was not as bustling a place as some other parts of the area, so there is some possibility that he ventured to either Richmond or Alexandria, Virginia, or even into the District of Columbia to play or listen to ragtime. Wherever he heard it, Phil managed to absorb the indigenous folk style of ragtime of the heartland. Working as a soloist or in bands, it sank in fairly well and stayed with him most of his life.

Phil described his own early Cake-walk and Ragtime band as being comprised of trumpet, trombone, banjo, piano, drums and, unusual for that time, soprano saxophone. As he remembered, "We couldn't get a clarinet." Phil said that the clarinet played straight harmony to the trumpet's lead, occasionally taking breaks, and that the trombone was the "clown" of the band, playing long slides and breaks as well. When writer Bill Martin once played a recording of Heebie Jeebies by Louis Armstrong for Phil, he remarked that the trombone playing of Edward "Kid" Ory on that track was much the way most ragtime band trombonists performed. Usually seated at the piano with his band, when they marched in parades he took to the trombone instead. He remembered his band's cakewalk performances of The Washington Post march and Under the Double Eagle in particular.

While Phil was said to have been a prolific composer, virtually all of his original works likely survive in manuscripts and recordings, or are the stuff of memories by now. On one of his surviving recordings he plays his Cincinnati Rag which starts out with elements of Jay Roberts' The Entertainer's Rag and a clear nod to Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag before it veers off into more original territory. There are elements of the trombone slide in his performance as well. Not having been to Cincinnati, Ohio, he chose the title because of the rhythmic accent of the syllables in the name. Phil also wrote a number of songs, one of which also survives on a recording, and claims to have written a ragtime opera about a visit by a group of African Negroes to Africa, the land of their earliest heritage.

Porter's style, as described in Martin's article in Record Changer, and as heard on the surviving recordings, was "a completely uncorrupted survival of what is probably a pre-Joplin approach to syncopated music. That is his manner and attack." Martin and Porter also both made the distinction between the "hot" and a p -

short-lived career as a professional pianist was pretty much over by 1910. He appears in the Census in Charlottesville at 21 still at home with his mother and siblings, but his status of single can be called into question. Curiously, Lizzie's last name is still Porter and she still shows up as widowed, but has two more children, daughters Mary Magdalene (7/1901) and Janie (1903). Initial research failed to turn up any birth, marriage or death certificate that would explain this. Phil was listed working as a janitor at the University of Virginia. In the 1916 Charlottesville directory, Lizzie appears as a domestic. Her last listing is in 1919 at the same address, with William, Horace and Mary still residing with their mother.

Phil would be married to his lifetime partner Josephine (Jackson) Porter perhaps some time just before or after the census was taken. Their first child, Mary E., showed a birth date of September 20, 1909, which is part of the source of the confusion. As the Census was taken in April, and Phil later indicates that he was married at 20 and that Mary was 10 years old in January 1920, the time line is a little fuzzy on the progression of events. By the time the Charlottesville directory came out later in 1910, he was living at 944 Lee. On his 1917 draft record, Porter again lists himself as a janitor for UVA, living at 309 10th Street NW, less than a mile from the University. The 1916 city directory suggests that he was working for the UVA Chemical Lab at that time. The 1920 Census shows the Porter family living at the same address, indicating that he owned the home. Additions to the large family included Irene A. in 1913, Ruth P. in 1915, Phillip A. Porter Jr. in 1917, Charles H. in December 1919, William in 1921, Josephine, named for her mother, in 1925, and Ronald Lowell on July 3, 1932. The 1920 census further whittled down his job as working specifically for a fraternity at the University: Chi Phi.

When Phil was working for us, per the 1953 interview, Porter's
UVA was still an all white, all male organization. Just the same, during his tenure caring for the fraternity house and property, he was held in high regard by the students in residence. According to Martin, Porter was “careful to pick out certain members of the Chi Phi, whose piano playing he liked, and to train them in his style. Working in the afternoons, he carefully taught a dozen young men his tunes and his beat, and they and he [were] very happy with the results.” Given that he worked for the fraternity for over 40 years, that statement alone indicates that there was a great deal of dedication and success that was of benefit to all parties.

There is no record of Phil playing in public from the 1920s to 1940s, but it is likely he played at some University events as well as occasional social gatherings or special celebrations in Charlottesville. The 1930 Census indicates that the expanding family had moved to a larger home up the street at 341 10th Street NW and that he was a janitor for a club (Chi Phi).

By now, his role, as per his remembrances, must also have expanded to friend and mentor to the students as well. Porter was listed in city directories from 1930 to 1945, as well as his 1942 draft record, specifically as working for Chi Phi. There are also some mentions in newspapers showing that he was an involved parent, with his children involved both in church activities and with the local Boy Scout troop.

Nearing his retirement in the early 1950s, Phil was offered the chance to make some recordings of his unique ragtime style. The dates are hard to pin down, and there were multiple occasions. The Martin article suggests 1949, but one of the Audiodisc dubbing of three tracks specifically shows April, 1951. Judging by the recording quality, there is a slight chance they were recorded on acetates before being dubbed to the 33 1/3 RPM discs, but more likely were done on an early 1949 or 1950 model Ampex magnetic tape recorded. The 1949 date is vague, so 1951 is most likely correct. They were most likely done at WINA, one of the only two Charlottesville AM radio stations in operation at that time.

The Martin article states that there were 12 cuts done. One can hear the comments of either engineers or bystanders in the studio at the beginning of the tracks, including one moment at the beginning of Memphis Blues where the presiding technician yells for everyone to be quiet, queuing Phil to start. Martin wrote: “The engineers who did the recording had never heard him before, but they were so delighted that they kept him overtime, cutting versions for their own collections. Perhaps some day these records can be issued; they make an important document. They are also might fine music.” The sole known remaining disc as of 2009 was given to the Chi Phi fraternity in 2005 by alumnus member Forman S. Johnston ’53, and framed along with Martin’s article. One unanswered question from the article was where the title “Doctor” came from, as it could have been applied during the ragtime era much as Professor often was, or perhaps bestowed upon him by Chi Phi in later years.

There was another set of recordings done around the same time by Birch Smith, but on an old upright in a larger room, likely the Chi Phi fraternity house. This tape, provided to the author from Dick Mushlitz by way of Carl Sonny Leyland, includes 14 unique tracks and three retakes. At one point when the recorders were making sure he was happy with what he was laying down, Phil comments that he was just doing what they asked. “I don’t follow this type of stuff. I don’t have the time.” He also apologizes somewhat for his singing, noting that it was not his strong point. These tracks are more likely representative of Phil in a relaxed environment letting loose with songs that were popular “back in the day.” The biggest issue is the use of too much sustain pedal in a very live room, but otherwise his interpretations of pieces like The Washington Post and Under the Bamboo Tree are more potentially representative of the average pianist during the ragtime era.

One of the final bits of business in Martin’s article noted that as 1953 Porter was retiring from his four decades of service with Chi Phi. His life beyond this is hard to trace. Phil Porter died in 1958 just three days short of his 70th birthday, and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Charlottesville along with some of his siblings. There are efforts underway to learn more about both Porter and his remaining recordings as of late 2009. He did, however, present a lovely theory of music for posterity: “They say that in heaven there is perfect music. And everybody who plays down here tries to imitate what they are playing all the time up there. The best musicians and the best bands are the ones that come closest to playing the heavenly music.” Porter was never a household name outside of Charlotte, but often the measure of such a person is the effect they had on all those that they touched during their lifetime with a smile or a joy. From what we know of Phil Porter, it may even be immeasurable.

The author was privileged to be able to access the one known remaining recording and restore, as best as possible, the three tracks on that disc. They are in Windows Media Audio (WMA) format and should play on virtually any computer. These are full fidelity renditions of the wave files of the restored tracks, which were recorded in relatively low fidelity in an AM radio station using early 1950s technology on a single microphone. The tracks still provide an accurate glimpse into the sound of Phil Porter, who was obviously delighted to be able to leave them for posterity. All three are presented here for free as part of the agreement of the restoration. They are for personal listening only and encoded so that they can be played, but not included on any production CDs as doing so would be an infringement of the agreement with Chi Phi of UVA who was very generous in their loan of the material. More may be posted at a later date.
Chi Phi Scholars: 
Alpha Brothers Move Up

In the most recent fraternity rankings (Fall 2009), our undergraduates have moved up to fourth in the IFC academic rankings. This is our highest level in recent years and is a gratifying result as our robust Alpha CEF (Chapter Excellence Fund) nears the $300,000 mark. We are also above other rankings like All Men’s and All University.

Congratulations to our actives on this superb achievement!

Fraternity:  
Beta Theta Pi 3.52
Sigma Chi 3.49
Zeta Psi 3.48
Chi Phi 3.43
Phi Delta Theta 3.43
Delta Sigma Phi 3.38
St. Anthony Hall 3.35
Sigma Alpha Epsilon 3.35
Phi Kappa Psi 3.33
Kappa Alpha 3.32

Beta Report
Sean McGinty - Beta

As it begins to warm up in Charlottesville this spring, the Chi Phi brothers at 161 Rugby Road leave behind one of the coldest winters in Charlottesville history. After multiple intense snow storms and frigid temperatures, the brothers are ready for the warmer weather and afternoons on the sun deck. The Chi Phi house is in the best shape in recent memory thanks to efforts such as this past summer’s floor reconditioning and recent attempts to add character to the first floor with old Chi Phi photographs and memorabilia. The recent addition of a projector and screen has also made the house the most popular place to gather and watch big sporting events.

The desirability to live at 161 Rugby Road is demonstrated by the need to add space for two more beds for the 2010-2011 school year. Although this does not match some of the numbers that I have heard have lived in the house in years prior, 25 will necessitate adding two more beds to the currently “full” house of 23. I feel the desire to be at the house is evidence of the strength of the Chi Phi brotherhood that has been at 161 Rugby Road since 1924.

As the Alpha Chapter of Chi Phi looks forward, we continue to try our best to be a valuable asset to the University and the Charlottesville community. Our participation in our own food drive this past fall and our academic standing in the Greek community demonstrate this. Our renewable land lease, which runs through 2024, has proven to be as valuable as ever while the University continues to expand. Lastly, this spring we welcomed a great new pledge class of 11 fine men. With the addition of them to the current brotherhood, I am confident Chi Phi will continue to be the best fraternity on grounds and the character and strength of the house will continue for years to come.

Brothers and guests at the 150th Anniversary Reunion last fall. 
Photos online at chiphiuva.com
Alumni Updates

Brothers Trey Garza ('07), Pete Deery ('05), Joey Minock ('05), Andrew Warin ('07), Eamon Redmond ('05), Andrew Callahan ('05), Brian Chadwick Shea ('05) and Ed Golay ('05) enjoy the winter scene at Beaver Creek.

Andrew Buckman ('02), friend Skybird Haynes, Andrew Callahan ('05), Eamon Redmond ('05), Dave Cowden ('03), friend Megan Peloquin, and Trey Garza ('07) enjoy a few drinks around the Pong-A-Long on New Years Eve.

Eric B. Johnson ’99

Eric and his wife, Anissa Listak, welcomed the arrival of their first child and daughter, Isabella Anne Johnson, on July 18. Isabella, better known as Ella, was 5 pounds 15 ounces in weight and 19 inches in length at birth. Eric began earning his Master’s of Science in Learning & Organizational Change degree at Northwestern University’s School of Education and Social Policy in September. In May, he was named one of Community Renewal Society’s 35 Under 35 emerging leaders for his work to eliminate racism and poverty in Chicago. Eric, Anissa, and Ella currently live in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago.

Submit Alumni Updates at www.chi phi uva.com

Chapter Eternal

We regret to inform you of the passing of the following Alpha Chapter alumni.

Charles B. Blackburn ’39
John S. Archer, Jr. ’40
William P. Snively ’41
Henry A. Biedenharn, Jr. ’42
John R. Henderson ’54
Stevens M. Jones ’55

www.chi phi uva.com