

THE MAGNIFICENT generation of jazz musicians which appeared in the wake of Louis Armstrong has now virtually faded away. One remarkable survivor, however, is the trumpeter Doc Cheatham, who is still playing regularly at the age of 91, and has just published this autobiography.

Jazz is still a relatively youthful form, as is shown by the fact that Cheatham's life spans more or less its entire history. He has played with most jazz figures of consequence from Bessie Smith to Wynton Marsalis. In Chicago in 1925 he deputised for Armstrong, and is still playing every Sunday in a Greenwich Village club. It is an astonishing feat, especially on an instrument that requires a degree of athleticism at any age.

How has he done it? He was not exceptionally robust — indeed, a doctor gave him 10 years to live in 1939. A mysterious and debilitating illness made him feel weak for most of the 1940s. It is true that — unusually for a jazz musician of his era — Cheatham is a life-long teetotaler. But then he recalls that his friend, the ragtime pianist Fubie Blake — who lived to be 100 — attributed his own longevity to never, ever having drunk a glass of water, always preferring health-giving wine or spirits.

Perhaps Doc's tranquil and serene temperament has helped to keep him going. It certainly seems to have carried him through a great deal of adversity — starting with the opposition of his middle-class black family to his choice of career (they intended him to become a pharmacist). He then endured decades of travel in

I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home: The Life of Doc Cheatham — Adolphus 'Doc' Cheatham  
ed by Alyn Shipton  
Cassell, £25

band buses, segregated hotels and restaurants, and overwork — up to 10 hours playing a day with Cab Calloway in the 1930s — and tight-fisted band leaders.

All these were part of the black musician's lot in those days. Only about the last does his tone become a little sharp. One avaricious trombonist who did him down, Cheatham records without sorrow, subse-



Doc Cheatham 'Serene'

quently died of electrocution as a result of trying to tamper with his electricity meter.

Cheatham's greatest success has come in the last two decades. "I guess I'm what you'd call a 'late bloomer'." He professes that he is still learning at 90, and ends up by commending a young trumpeter around 70 years his junior.

Cheatham's magnificent trumpet style, full of clarion-calls and gentle, far-away melodies, is now one of the few remaining links with the jazz of the 1920s and early 1930s. This short memoir (under 100 pages), with attached discography, will interest anyone who loves that period and style.

# Trumpet voluntary

Martin Gayford admires the last survivor of a great jazz generation

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Dear Doc

Good to talk to you last week. Here's the first major review of your book from the Sunday Telegraph. More to follow.

Best wishes  
Alyn