



**THE**  
**OXFORD**  
**COMPANION TO**  
**JAZZ**

EDITED BY  
**BILL**  
**KIRCHNER**

**THE OXFORD COMPANION TO JAZZ**

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# Jazz

EDITED BY

Bill Kirchner

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## Preface

My part in this book began in the fall of 1996, when Sheldon Meyer, then vice president of editorial at Oxford University Press, asked me to lunch. Sheldon, whose four-decade association with Oxford is legendary in the publishing field (he's one of the great editors and has been responsible for bringing a staggering number of outstanding jazz books, among others, into print), had an idea for a jazz volume different from any other. It would be an adjunct to the popular and influential *Oxford Companion* series, and it would contain specially commissioned essays on jazz—in all of its multifarious aspects—by a large number of the best authorities in the field. Sheldon had asked Dan Morgenstern, director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University and long respected as one of the finest writers on the subject, for a recommendation for someone to edit such a book. Dan had suggested me.

Gulp. I told Sheldon that I would think about his offer carefully—he knows great luncheon places, by the way—but my initial internal reaction was “No way.” The responsibility of conceiving and supervising such a project was daunting, to say the least. But the more I thought about it, the more intriguing the prospect became. We agreed on terms, and off I went on a unique journey.

I began by compiling an extensive list of possible topics, and this became—after helpful suggestions from Sheldon, Dan, and author Gary Giddins—the basis of *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*. (The pieces here, by the way, are somewhat longer than is typical of other volumes in the *Companion* series.) Next, deciding on whom to ask to write the essays. I've been involved in jazz most of my life, and if I might flatter myself, I have a pretty good idea of who the movers and shakers in the field are: musicians, writers, producers, educators, broadcasters, record-industry people, and others. And when I don't know something, I generally know who can tell me what I need to learn. So the list of potential contributors came quite easily. I knew many of these persons already, and that made soliciting contributions less of a chore than it might otherwise have been. In a few cases, I asked Lewis Porter and Richard M. Sudhalter—both of whom have essays herein—for recommendations on writers, and they came through unflinchingly.

I'm happy to report that surprisingly few folks whom I approached turned me down. In the almost two years it took to get these pieces delivered from all over the world, there were a handful of dropouts, and in all cases I was able to find replacements of comparable quality. My only regret is that I was not able to offer topics to all of the writers I wanted to include. If there are authors you think should be represented here who aren't, chances are good that either they declined to write a piece, or another equally qualified person got the nod for a particular topic. Such is life.

So, you may be wondering, what's it like to deal with fifty-nine experts with fifty-nine sets of work habits? Most interesting and varied, I reply diplomatically. Suffice it to say that I didn't, to the best of my knowledge, lose any friends in the course of this work, and I made quite a few new ones. My job encompassed a variety of roles: editor, friend, cheerleader, psychologist, and occasionally, pain-in-the-derrière. There were times when I internalized the late cartoonist-pundit Al Capp's self-description: an expert on nothing with opinions on everything. But I persevered.

Whether or not I triumphed is, of course, for you, the reader, to decide. But I feel satisfied that I did a job well worth doing to the best of my ability. Aside from all of the aforementioned gentlemen—most of all Sheldon Meyer, a consistent provider of sage counsel and encouragement—I'd like to thank Penelope Anderson, Joellyn Aunsanka, and Susan Day of Oxford for their ceaseless expertise and good

cheer; copy editor India Cooper and indexer Judith Hancock for their usual sterling work; and my wife Judy, whose support went well beyond the call of marital duty. And lest we forget, the inventor of e-mail, without whose invention this book would not have been possible.

This book is dedicated to the memory of William J. Kirchner (1923–1999).

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**THE OXFORD COMPANION TO JAZZ**

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## Introduction

I think there are only three things that America will be known for two thousand years from now: the Constitution, jazz music, and baseball, the three most beautifully designed things this country ever produced.

••• *Gerald Early, author and cultural historian*

Jazz is not a “what,” it’s a “how,” and if you do things according to the “how” of jazz, it’s jazz.

••• *Bill Evans, pianist and composer*

The word “jazz” means to me “no category.”

••• *Wayne Shorter, saxophonist and composer*

**T**he above quotes—the first from one of this volume’s fifty-nine contributors, and the others from two of the most important jazz musicians of the past half century—tell us a great deal about why this book exists, and what makes jazz the unique and vitally important music that it is.



Photo: George P. Kahn.

Throughout the—roughly speaking—century-old history of jazz, there have been numerous attempts to “define” what the music is or isn’t. None of these has ever proven successful or widely accepted, and invariably they tell us much more about the tastes, prejudices, and limitations of the formulators than they do about the music. You’ll find no such attempts here.

Jazz has also been called “America’s classical music”—a description that I disagree with. America’s classical music is classical music: the works of Ives, Copland, Barber, Schuman, et al. Western classical music comes from an aesthetic with its own set of ground rules, and America’s contributions to it have, for the most part, been created within that framework. One of the glories of jazz is that it has become an art music with its own rules and aesthetic, and as Wayne Shorter implies, even those rules are meant to be challenged, and often broken, rather than reverently adhered to. As is typical of the black American culture from which it emerged, jazz is a music of healthy defiance.

Jazz is also a music of inclusion, rather than exclusion. From its inception, jazz has been a melting pot of influences and techniques that have come from an immense variety of sources. Multicultural long before that term became fashionable, it has never been more so than now, played and listened to in most parts of the world. Though some might argue with Gerald Early’s contention that jazz, the Constitution, and baseball are the only things for which America ultimately will be remembered, he does have an indisputable point about the vast influence of the three. Moreover, one could make a case that jazz has had a stronger worldwide impact than either the Constitution or baseball. Jazz is a force in numerous parts of the world where baseball is ignored, and as Mike Zwerin points out in his essay on European jazz, it often has endured in defiance—that term, once again—of totalitarian governments that were anything but sympathetic to the ideals of the U.S. Constitution.

If, as Bill Evans asserted, jazz is a “how” rather than a “what,” then perhaps this book can be best described as a “book of hows.” Specifically, how the music came into being, how it grew by leaps and bounds, how its greatest practitioners have made it what it is today, how it flourishes in a multiplicity of styles, how it has had a vital impact on other aspects of twentieth-century culture, how it continues to evolve, and more. That isn’t to say that our contributors always agree on all of these issues. For example, you need examine only the first two essays to discover that two eminent scholars, Samuel

A. Floyd Jr. and William H. Youngren, have often differing viewpoints on the roots of the music. For me, such differences are part of the stimulation of this book.

About the contributors. As I mentioned, there are fifty-nine of them, and they are among the finest musicians, scholars, and critics in jazz at the end of the twentieth century. Fully half are musicians who are currently (or in a few cases, formerly) working professionals. Without in the least intending to slight the expertise of the non-musicians among our contributors, I view the high percentage of musician-authors here as a definite coup. It gives a “view from the inside” that makes this book all the more valuable. In fact, four of the essayists—Bill Crow, Dick Katz, Max Morath, and Randy Sandke—deserve to be mentioned in the pieces they wrote.

When I commissioned these essays, many of the writers asked, “Who is the intended audience for this book?” “Anyone,” I replied, “from novices just coming to the music for the first time to seasoned listeners who know a great deal.” This provided the authors with an additional challenge—aside from that of severely disciplining themselves in order to fit as much information as comfortably possible into a short format. A number complained mightily, and I was not unsympathetic, but I believe that all of our contributors have emerged triumphant from their ordeals. You, the reader, are the beneficiary. Whether you know a little or a lot about jazz, you’ll know a great deal more after reading *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*. Read it from beginning to end, or dip into it at any point. But most of all, enjoy it. And the music.



## African Roots of Jazz

*Samuel A. Floyd Jr.*

**A**frican-American musical practices in the United States cannot be traced directly to specific populations in Africa with any degree of certainty. But it is possible to document certain general practices that are common to music in Africa and to black music in the United States and widespread in both. Thus we can draw reasonable conclusions about possible relationships between musical practices in Africa and those among jazz musicians in the United States. It can be hypothesized, for example, and determined to a high degree of certainty, that particular musical tendencies were brought with Africans to the New World, preserved within and outside the dancing ring of slave culture, and spread throughout African-derived populations in the United States, eventually becoming an integral part of the music we now know as jazz.

In traditional Africa, spiritual divinities were a part of the daily lives of entire societies. Known among the Yoruba as *orisha* and in other cultures variously as *abosom* (Ashanti), *vodun* (Fon), and *alose* (Ibo), these gods influenced the conduct of human affairs, arbitrarily created ill or good will, helped or hindered individuals and the group, informed or limited the knowledge of populations, and interacted



Calabash drummer at the court of Moro Naba, Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, c. 1950. Photo: Arthur S. Alberts. Courtesy of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

with each other. Among the Yoruba's other numerous deities, for example, Olodumare was senior, known as God, creator of the universe; Orulna was the diviner and symbol of wisdom; Ochosi was the divine hunter; and Esu (also called Eshu, Legba, Esu-Elegbara, Eshu Elleguá) was an inveterate prankster who occasionally caused havoc in the lives of believers. For traditional Africans, these divinities dwelled in the material and the nonmaterial (or spirit) worlds and were an essential part of ritual in the societies that believed in them.

In sacred rituals, these deities mount and take charge of human hosts who dance to the songs and rhythms that the divinities are said to own, imitating their character and conduct. Thus, in highly stylized and controlled theatrics, the hosts become mediums who mime the character of their riders. (Africans say that it is not the hosts who do the dancing but the divinities themselves.) In these rituals, possession is brought on by drumming, chanting, singing, and persistent and energetic dance in the form of mass dancing, team dancing, small-group dancing (two, three, or four people), and ring dancing. In many African societies, this dancing took place in the dance ring—symbol of community, solidarity, affirmation, and catharsis—and also in formations that were linear, circular, semicircular, or serpentine.

A drawing in T. Edward Bowdich's book *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* shows a marching band in Africa in ritual ceremony, with the author explaining that the participants presented themselves to the king, formed and moved around a circle to the music of more than forty drums, and made salutes to umbrellas. Francis Bebey, in his *African Music: A People's Art*, discusses funeral processions in which the music could be celebratory, with sounding trumpets and drums showing vigorous respect for the deceased. In some of the burial ceremonies themselves, trickster tales are told; the dead, who are susceptible to humor and excitement, are said to like such stories. In at least one country, Suriname, versions of the Anansi trickster tale, for example, were told during burial ceremonies to amuse the spirit of the deceased.

The significance of these tales to a discussion of African influences on jazz music lies in the fact that they contain features that are shared with other African performance traditions: indirection, argument, and opposition, as well as "overlap, apart-playing, and interlock," as Roger Abrahams points out in his *African Folktales: Traditional Stories of the Black World*. These oral practices would come to be as effective in jazz music as they are in vocal narrative.

In processions and in the line and ring dances of African burial

and other stationary ceremonies, the rhythms of the music were accompanied by shoulder and head movements, foot stamping, hand clapping, and vocal shouts that animated the performances. Among the Akan, young children imitated the steps and movements of adult dancers, moving "along the fringes of the ring and behind it," according to the musicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia in his *Drumming in Akan Communities* (1963, 165–66). By observing and studying such activities, we have come to better understand the nature of "shouting" in African-American ring ritual and its derivatives. Shouting has implications for the origin of the second line of New Orleans jazz funerals and for the origin and nature of scat singing in early and later jazz music—for example, Louis Armstrong's vocal imitations of instrumental melodic improvisations, as in his "Heebie Jeebies" of 1926, and the riffing "calls" of Cab Calloway's *Hi-de-hi-de-hos*.

The rhythmic elements of African-American music were derived from African time-line practices in which the instruments of ensembles play multilinear rhythms that yield characteristic interlocking, cross-rhythmic (two or more contrasting rhythms played simultaneously), and polyrhythmic (two or more rhythms played simultaneously) musical configurations. Performed most frequently by a clapperless bell called the *gankogui*, steady asymmetrical (e.g., 3:2 rhythmic relationships) background rhythms are sounded continuously through dance performances. Gerhard Kubik, in his article entitled "Analogies and Differences in African-American Musical Culture Across the Hemisphere: Interpretive Models and Research," which appeared in volume 18 of *Black Music Research Journal*, has given examples of such background rhythms or time-lines (see page 11).

In African-American music, especially in jazz, time-lines became symmetrical (e.g., 2:2 rhythmic relationships) rather than asymmetrical (in the form of various underlying divisive pulses, riffs, and *ostinati*) and, in most cases, less persistent and less consistent. Nevertheless, the African time-line concept, in attenuated and modified form, virtually defines the rhythmic basis of African-American vernacular music and jazz. Together, the bell and the other instruments of African ensembles, with their resulting multilinear rhythms, comprise what Nketia, in *The Music of Africa*, has called "little tunes."

Regarding tunes in the form of singing, Alan Lomax, in his article entitled "Africanisms in New World Music" (which can be found in *The Haitian Potential*, edited by Vera Rubin and Richard P. Schaedel), demonstrated that across black Africa there exists an "extraor-

Cycle number	Pattern structure	Notation		Predominant geographical distribution
8	3+5	[ x x •	x • x x • ]	universal
12	5+7	[ x • x x •	x • x • x x • ]	Guinea coast, West Central Africa, Zambezi valley
16	7+9	[ x • x • x x •	x • x • x • x x • ]	Central and West Central Africa
20	9+11	[ x • x • x • x x •	x • x • x • x • x x • ]	(no data available)
24	11+15	[ x • x • x • x • x x •	x • x • x • x • x • x x • ]	Pygmies of the Upper Sangha (Central African Republic, Congo)

dinary homogeneity of African song style” that, in part, is textually repetitious; slurred in enunciation; “lacking in embellishment and free rhythm; low on exclusive leadership; high on antiphony, chorally; especially high on overlapped antiphony; high on one-phrase melodies . . . ; and highest on polyrhythmic (or hot) accompaniments; and that African music generally is repetitious, cohesive, overlapping or interlocked, multi-leveled, and hot.”

Despite the generalizations contained in Lomax’s statement, to which exceptions may prevail depending on the specific locations in which Africans happen to reside, this song style, together with various African speech patterns, comprises the verbal basis of African melody and rhythm. Bebey has observed, for example, that in Africa the primary purpose of the instruments is to “reconstitute spoken language.” According to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, in her *American Diary, 1857–8*, many African peoples imitate instruments with their voices and add “peculiar . . . musical sounds at the end of the verses,” a practice that probably grew out of some African peoples’ propensity to *speak* the last words or syllables of musical phrases, which is probably related to their propensity toward elision and results from the

tendency of these peoples to mirror in their singing the rises and falls of the pitches and pitch-inflections of their regular speech. Some of these practices are undoubtedly sources of the blue notes, elisions, and other melodic assets of African-American singing style. Other characteristics of traditional African music, ranging from the simple monophony of Watusi warriors to the complicated melodic polyphony (two or more melodies sounded simultaneously) of the pygmies of Central Africa, make use variously of melodic monophony (one melody without accompaniment), heterophony (a single melody sounded simultaneously in two voices or instruments, one, or each, containing modifications that depart from the original), and polyphony; parallel thirds; overlapping call-and-response events; and, Kebede points out, “tongue clicks, suction stops, explosive endings, throaty gurgles,” and “hand-clapping with off-beat syncopation.” In African “calls,” says Bebey, communication is made effective by “the intonations and rhythmic onomatopoeia of speech,” with African singers producing sonorities that are unusual and powerful through use of head and chest voice, stammers, inflections, and sonic characterizations that depict aspects of African life.

Nketia, in *The Music of Africa*, says that “although rhythm is the primary focus of drumming, some attention is paid to pitch level, for the aesthetic appeal of drumming lies in the rhythmic and melodic elements.” Olly Wilson goes further, stating, in his article entitled “The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music” (in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, edited by Josephine Wright with Samuel A. Floyd Jr.), that the rhythm-motives of the drums and the pitches and contrasting timbres that produce them create “mosaics of tone color and pitch,” which constitute a heterogeneous sound ideal. This sonic ideal results from the interaction that takes place among all the performing forces in an African ensemble—among, depending on cases, solo voice, chorus, hand clapping, and the rhythms of idiophones (hard-surface instruments played by striking), aerophones (wind instruments), and chordophones (stringed instruments). In the resulting “tonal mosaic,” drum, rattle, bell, voice, and hand claps not only contrast but commingle in a sound complex that is unequivocally African. This African sound, which is reflected also in strictly vocal music, was brought to the Americas and came sonically to define the music of dance rings throughout the New World. In locations and situations in which enslaved Africans were denied use of the drum, and even outside such locations, they “patted juba,” a practice that included among its var-

ious versions the hemiola of the hambone pat. Making use of the hands to drum upon thighs, chest, and other body parts, the juba pat was an extension and elaboration of simple hand clapping that evolved to become a complete and self-contained accompaniment to the dance.

The values of ancestor worship, trickster devices, and other symbolic practices of African culture, together with African time-line patterns and vocal and instrumental procedures, were preserved most effectively and shaped to the Africans' new circumstances in New World versions of the ring shout. It was from this cultural phenomenon that the elements of African-American music would emerge: calls, cries, and hollers; call-and-response devices; additive rhythms and polyrhythms; heterophony, pendular thirds (back-and-forth movement between notes two steps apart), blue notes, bent notes, and elisions; hums, moans, grunts, vocables (sung sounds and words devoid of meaning), and other rhythmic-oral declamations, interjections, and punctuations; offbeat melodic phrasings and parallel intervals and chords; constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures and phrases (from which riffs and vamps would be derived); timbral distortions of various kinds; musical individuality within collectivity; game rivalry; hand clapping, foot patting, and approximations thereof; apart-playing; and the metronomic pulse that underlies all African-American music—all coming to manifest themselves in the shuffling, angular, offbeat, additive, repetitive, and intensive, unflagging rhythms of jazz.

The most popular and ubiquitous instruments of slave culture—the banjo, flute, violin, triangle, drum, quills, and sticks (bones)—were well suited to the realization of the rhythmic and tonal stratifications of the heterogeneous sound ideal, as it would be made manifest in African and African-American music. This phenomenon played a critical role in determining the nature of jazz in the following ways. Melodically, this sound ideal is manifest in microtonal inflections in pentatonic and modally ambiguous contexts; in singing voices that are sometimes and variously rough, sandy, piercing, and falsetto; in wordless sounds that are sometimes used for their own value rather than for the communication of verbal meaning; in ease of movement between speaking and singing and speech-song; and in the use of ululations, grunts, hums, shouts, and melismas as integral and indispensable parts of the musical meaning. Rhythmically, this phenomenon manifests itself in hand clapping, foot patting, and patting juba, in the repetition of short rhythmic motives, cross-rhythms,

accented and isolated second beats, and in “basing” (repetitive accompanying phrasings). Textually narratives, told in dialect and in call-and-response, are presented in metaphor, figure of speech, implication, indirection, and personification.

In jazz music, the African musical practices of heterophony, call-and-response, riffing time lines, cyclic structures, additive and cross-rhythms, intonations, and onomatopoeia became widespread, although transformed and somewhat attenuated. And given the African insistence on a heterogeneous sound blend, the specific instrumentation of the early jazz bands—clarinet, trumpet, trombone, tuba, banjo, and drums—may have been influenced as much by the preferences of transplanted Africans as by the instrumentation of European-derived band sections. African Americans used European musical instruments to syncretize a timbral mosaic that, together with other elements, came to be recognizable as the sound of jazz.

The call-and-response device is found in extended form in the twelve-bar blues of U.S. provenance, in which, for example, a two-measure instrumental “response” answers a pair of two-measure vocal “calls”—comprising a sonic mimicry that creates the illusion of speech or of narrative conversation—and in jazz, in call-and-response-style riffs. Thus jazz, like African music, possesses a “telling effect” that Albert Murray, in his *The Hero and the Blues*, says “asserts, alleges, quests, requests, and implies . . . mocks, groans, concurs, and signifies misgivings and suspicions,” with the performance making use of what Dominique Zahan, in his book entitled *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, refers to as “implication, euphemism, symbol, allegory.” In jazz, as in African music, when dancers perform—with, in the African way, a bump here, a grind there, a nod and a dip elsewhere—they are responding to what the musicians play on their instruments; similarly, the musicians react to the movements, gestures, and urgings of the dancers.

In their dances, Africans pantomimed the poetry of African song. In this tradition, gestures are symbols, and artistic practice is judged according to aesthetic and ethical sensibilities that balance the good and the bad, the true and the false. Among the Yoruba specifically, according to Babatunde Lawal (in his article “Some Aspects of Yoruba Aesthetics,” which appeared in volume 3 of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*), performing artistry is “judged by the quality of a presentation. A good singer or poet is judged not only by the quality of his voice but also by the quality of his composition,” and, with drumming, “artistry in music is recognized in the individual’s ability to

'talk' with the drum and in the over-all rhythm or melody of an orchestral performance." In Yoruba aesthetics, judgment is consensual, shared throughout the community. It is for these reasons, among others, that in performance settings jazz musicians and dancers react so effectively to one another and that jazz musicians rely so comfortably on their audiences for critical evaluation; it is also why jazz audiences communicate their approval and disapproval of artistic gestures and other realizations of aesthetic form through vocal encouragement, silence, or, sometimes, good-natured mocking.

Over the three centuries in which African musical practices and assumptions were transformed into new structures and ideas—molded in a process in which European instruments, forms, and practices were superimposed on a foundation of transplanted African cultural preferences and practices—black musicians performed on the violin, banjo, musical saw, reed flutes, drums (where and when they were not prohibited), sticks or bones, and rattles of various kinds; and they sang rhyme songs, songs of satire, derision, and mimicry, songs of nostalgia and nonsense, children's songs, lullabies, and songs of love, all with a humor that served as their armament in a struggle for life and liberty. Through it all, there was present the heterogeneous sound ideal, the contrasting conglomerate that is so well suited for the rhythmic, polyphonic, and tonal stratification of jazz.

In jazz, African musical practices such as time-lines, the song-style techniques described by Lomax, the calls, cries, and hollers, the game-rivalry, onomatopoeia, and all the rest are performed within a context that has been described by Thomas Brothers as "solo and cycle." In his article entitled "Solo and Cycle in African-American Jazz" (*Musical Quarterly*) Brothers offers a theoretical model for analyzing jazz along lines that echo the position that Richard Waterman took in his article entitled "African Influence on the Music of the Americas" (in *Acculturation in the Americas*, edited by Sol Tax), that is, that early Africans in the United States must have considered European musical ideas as source material to be explored within a "generalized" African musical context. Viewing Waterman's position as a hypothesis to prove, Brothers uses as a point of departure southern Ewe music, with its division of ensemble performance into two rhythmic groups: a variable group and a fixed group. He then identifies the harmonic "solo and cycle" in jazz performance as analogous to the "variable" group and "fixed" group in southern Ewe drumming. Brothers has discovered that although the harmonic cycle in jazz is organizationally slightly different than the Ewe rhythmic cycle, both produce and are

dependent upon the same syntactical model. He cites Louis Armstrong's solo on "Big Butter and Egg Man" as an example of how pitch is used to articulate temporal relationships in a way that is similar to the "African model" and, scholar that he is, cites Lester Young's solo in "Lester Leaps In" and Coleman Hawkins's "Body and Soul" as examples that depart from that model. He indicates that these latter approaches are expansions of the approach founded by Armstrong, as they stretch "the connection between soloist and cycle without severing it." Brothers's purpose is to view pitch (which has been touted as the European contribution to jazz) and rhythm (touted as the African) as "complementary components of a consistent melodic idiom, rather than as independent parameters having distinct antecedents." He maintains that the solo-and-cycle approach to syntax eventually embraced by Armstrong and others came to jazz from earlier and simpler African-derived repertories and provided the basis for the later model.

This model, refined in various ways over the approximately seventy years of jazz's development, continues to embrace the many, diverse, and profound influences of African music on the formation of jazz. In melodies, as they are played by jazz musicians, for example, we hear microtonal inflections in pentatonic and modally ambiguous contexts, voices that are sometimes and variously rough, sandy, piercing, and falsetto, with vocal sounds that are sometimes used for their own value rather than for the communication of verbal meaning, and with ease of movement from speaking to singing. We hear also ululations, grunts, hums, shouts, and melisma as integral and indispensable parts of the musical meaning of jazz renditions. In rhythm, we hear the influences of African music making in hand clapping, foot patting, and patting juba, in the repetition of short rhythmic motives, in cross-rhythms, accented and isolated second beats, and the rhythmic oscillations and call-and-response patterns of riffs and phrasings. In song texts, we hear and experience the influences of tales and legends told in metaphor, figures of speech, implication, indirection, and personification in call-and-response fashion. In musical phrases, we hear the influence of Africa in the sounds of the blue notes, African-style elisions, and other melodic assets of African-American singing style that resulted from African Americans' use of the cultural, physical, and musical assets Africans brought with them to a new homeland in which jazz would be born.



## European Roots of Jazz

*William H. Youngren*

When most people think of European music, they think first of the concert (or “serious” or “classical”) music of the past few centuries—dating back, say, to Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi. And certainly jazz does not sound like most of this music. It especially does not sound like the music of the composers we most often hear today in the concert hall: Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Debussy. What distinguishes jazz most sharply from the music of these composers and their contemporaries is that jazz has a firm and steady beat, kept by the drums and the other rhythm instruments. Jazz, as we know, originated as dance music, and all dance music needs a secure rhythmic foundation to guide the dancers.

The concert music of the last few centuries, however, is not the only sort of European music. Europeans, like Americans, developed their own characteristic forms of dance music, and when they emigrated to this country, they brought their dance music with them. One type that has grown popular in recent years is Jewish klezmer music—which, everyone has noticed, sounds remarkably like jazz. Recordings made in Europe in the 1920s and even earlier show that



Sidney Bechet with the Wildcats in Columbia Studios, New York, 1947. Left to right: Johnny Glasel, cornet; Bob Mielke, trombone; Denny Strong, drums; Bechet, clarinet; Charlie Traeger, bass; Dick Wellstood, piano; Bob Wilber, clarinet. Courtesy of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

it sounded that way before jazz could possibly have influenced it directly. Anyone who has ever attended an Italian or a Polish wedding will have heard other sorts of ethnic dance music that also sound rather like jazz. One reason these ethnic dance musics sound like jazz is that they too, being music for dancing, have a steady beat. But there is another, far more important, reason.

Jazz, the various sorts of dance music imported to this country from Europe, and the concert music of the last few centuries are all species of tonal music. That is, they are music written (or improvised) in a major or minor key, music organized according to the system of major-minor harmonic tonality that gradually developed, in ways that are still being debated, out of the modal music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and that became fully fixed in the early eighteenth century.

In the earliest jazz we can study closely, recorded jazz from 1917 on, the chord progressions that determine a melody's changing relation to the key of the piece are, roughly, those that were so used in the late eighteenth century, the time of Haydn and Mozart. Moreover, the phrases of the popular songs of the 1920s and earlier, which formed the basis for the vast majority of early recorded jazz performances, are similar in character to the phrases of late eighteenth-century music. They are mostly two or four bars long and are often arranged either in balanced pairs, each pair consisting of an "antecedent" and a "consequent" phrase, or else in sequences. The songs themselves are usually thirty-two bars long, and tend to fall into sections of eight or sixteen bars, though sections are often slightly extended, for effect—which was also a favorite trick of Haydn's. Except for waltzes and novelty numbers, the songs generally have four beats to the bar. A typical jazz performance of the 1920s will consist of a statement of the song by the full band, a series of solos improvised on the chord progressions of the song and perhaps (though not necessarily) making reference to its melody, and probably a concluding ensemble. Such performances may therefore be thought of as having a theme-and-variations form that is loosely (or not at all) structured melodically but strictly structured harmonically, a form similar to that of the baroque chaconne or passacaglia.

Thus the various interrelated elements of early jazz—harmony, melody, rhythm, and form—are very similar to those of late eighteenth-century music and are in fact derived more or less directly from them, by way of the American popular song literature. In 1919 the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet was in London with Sergi

Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Ansermet chanced to hear the black jazz clarinetist (and, later, soprano saxophonist) Sidney Bechet, who was touring with Will Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra, and he wrote an article about the experience. Ansermet described the form of the pieces he heard as "gripping, abrupt, harsh, with a brusque and pitiless ending like that of Bach's Second Brandenburg Concerto." Singling out Bechet as "an artist of genius," Ansermet compared him to "those figures to whom we owe the creation of our art as we know it today—those men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, who wrote the expressive works of dance airs which cleared the way for Haydn and Mozart."

Ansermet's comparison is not only apt but also, considering its early date, remarkably perceptive. That jazz was, from its beginnings, tonal music, and is therefore basically European or Western in nature, is so obvious that it should not need as labored a demonstration as I am giving here. The creators of jazz were, after all, men, most of them black but many of them white, who had been surrounded all their lives by tonal music—in church, in school, at parties, at celebrations on the village green. Moreover, the instruments they played—piano, violin, the various brass and woodwind instruments left over from Civil War bands—were constructed and tuned so as to produce the intervals and scales on which tonal music is based.

Yet as recently as 1968, Gunther Schuller, one of our finest writers on jazz, could emphatically declare, in the first chapter of his otherwise excellent book *Early Jazz*, that "every musical element—rhythm, harmony, melody, timbre, and the basic forms of jazz—is essentially African in background and derivation" (62). As I demonstrated at the time in my review of *Early Jazz* (*Hudson Review*, Autumn 1969), this sweeping statement is not only not proven by Schuller's argument; it also goes dead against what his principal source, A. M. Jones's *Studies in African Music* (1959), tells us about the ways in which the music of West Africa, ancestral home of most of the blacks imported to this country as slaves, is actually organized.

To say that jazz is basically European or Western in nature is of course not to imply that it could have originated in Europe—or indeed anywhere else than in the United States. Jazz is obviously a hybrid, containing both European and non-European elements, and it is only in this country that all of these elements could be found, coexisting and in the proper relation to one another. Jazz is European in the same sense in which English is a Germanic language. Like jazz, English too—thanks to William the Conqueror—is a hybrid. It

has many more loanwords from French and other Romance languages than do any of the other languages that we classify as Germanic. Also, it has gradually lost most of the case-endings and other inflections still found in German. Yet English shares with the other Germanic languages the most basic underlying features of its syntax and phonology. Just so, jazz shares with other forms of European music the general harmonic and melodic characteristics that give it its firm basis in the Western tonal system.

These shared characteristics are of course not the ones that make jazz instantly recognizable as jazz—rather than as klezmer music or the Second Brandenburg Concerto. The characteristics that make jazz sound like jazz have usually, and probably correctly, been traced to the blues and to ragtime. From the blues came many melodic inflections, particularly ones involving the so-called blue notes—the flatted third, fifth, and seventh of the major scale. From ragtime came the syncopated figures found in both the melodies and the rhythmic background of early jazz. Many older jazz players have told of learning, anywhere from 1900 to around 1920, how to “rag” popular songs of the day by syncopating the melody, shifting accents, and so on. It was, as we know from ample written testimony, these bluesy inflections and syncopated rhythms that made jazz sound new and distinctive to its first listeners, and that made some love it while repelling others.

But what made jazz, at first hearing, relatively intelligible, to those who loved it and those who hated it, was the fact that it was tonal music, employing essentially the same melodic and harmonic language that the American popular song literature had employed at least since the Civil War. The melodic contours, the harmonic progressions, the ways in which phrases were formed and in which they responded to one another, the steady 4/4 rhythm—all these were familiar, even though tricked out in new dress. So the metaphor embodied in my title is most apt: the roots of a tree are out of sight, below ground level; just so, the roots of jazz, the traditional tonal language it inherited from the popular song literature, are below the surface of a casual listener’s conscious attention. But just as with a tree, it is the European, tonal roots of jazz that first gave it life and that then enabled it to grow and thrive throughout its period of productive development.

The metaphor of roots is also applicable in another way to jazz. For as a tree grows, so too do its roots continue to grow—though remaining unseen. Just so, the specific uses that jazz made of the

tonal language did not remain static but changed—often in ways parallel to the changes that had earlier taken place in concert music. As someone once said, jazz harmony went from the age of Mozart to the age of Mahler in about a quarter century.

Some of these changes came directly from concert music. Bill Challis, who arranged for Paul Whiteman's band in the late 1920s, was very fond of Debussy and Ravel, and we can hear their influence in his scores: in his frequent use of figures based on the whole-tone scale, of augmented triads, and of dominant ninth chords in parallel stepwise motion—as in Ravel's familiar *Pavane pour une infante défunte*. We can also hear it in the solos cornetist Bix Beiderbecke improvised on the Whiteman recordings of Challis scores and in Beiderbecke's piano piece "In a Mist," which he recorded—he was also a gifted pianist—in 1927.

The work that Challis and other arrangers did for Whiteman significantly influenced the later bands of Duke Ellington, Jimmie Lunceford, and Fletcher Henderson—for whom Challis wrote a few scores. In 1933 Henderson's tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins composed a wildly experimental piece, "Queer Notions," based mainly on whole-tone progressions, which the Henderson band recorded not once but twice.

Some of the changes in jazz harmony, however, seem to have been motivated internally, by changes taking place in popular songs. At the end of the 1920s, as slow ballads became popular—no doubt owing in part to the playing of jazz soloists such as Beiderbecke and Hawkins—lush romantic harmonies became more common in pop songs. Also, secondary dominant seventh chords began to be replaced, particularly in cadences, by minor seventh chords, creating a smoother harmonic flow, a more "sophisticated" sound appropriate to the ballads and the emotions they expressed. Finally, ordinary major and minor triads routinely had a sixth added to them. The joint effect of these and similar changes was to take the sharp edges off the chord progressions, to disguise slightly the dominant-tonic movement central to the operation of the tonal system.

The emergence of bebop, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, brought further harmonic changes that grew out of these earlier ones and that also had no direct parallel in concert music. The major triads that had had sixths added to them in the preceding decade now had major sevenths added instead, the major seventh producing a slight dissonant clash with the root of the chord. Dominant seventh chords picked up flatted fifths and flatted ninths. And, just as happened in

concert music though in different ways, the increase in dissonance produced an increase in chromatic harmonic movement. Through a process called tritone substitution, cadences were formed from a series of chromatically descending seventh chords rather than by going through the dominant-tonic "circle of fifths."

From the late 1920s to the early 1940s there were also marked changes in melodic phrasing. The rather clipped, balanced phrases of the 1920s began, particularly in the work of Louis Armstrong between 1928 and 1933, to give way to longer, more lyrical lines and a romantic, rhapsodic style of improvisation that was, like the changes in harmony then taking place, well suited to slow romantic ballads. We can also see this change in the slightly later work of Hawkins and the other most important tenor saxophonist of the swing era, Lester Young. Each had a great influence on the boppers, and their two influences were complementary: Hawkins's long lines rigorously explored every possible implication of a tune's harmony, while Young's seemed to float, coolly ambivalent, above the chord changes—he was fond of landing, at the end of a phrase, on either the sixth or the ninth of the chord of the moment, two scale steps that are neither dissonant nor clearly consonant. We can also see these longer lines, though with a more traditional blues coloring, in the work of guitarist Charlie Christian.

These are only a few of the more important specific changes in the way jazz used the tonal system between the late 1920s and the early 1940s. Throughout this period and beyond, into the early 1960s, the general direction in which jazz moved was roughly similar to that taken by concert music after Wagner. Once jazz began to grow more complex harmonically, it necessarily became more dissonant, filled with extended and altered chords. Finally, in the 1960s and 1970s some players moved jazz out of tonality altogether, just as Schoenberg and other composers had done with concert music in the early years of this century.

Jazz is related to other European music not only at the deepest levels, by virtue of being based on the Western tonal system, but also in more superficial yet still important ways, through various stylistic borrowings. These borrowings are from three main sources: brass band music, which influenced jazz formally; Latin American music, which influenced it rhythmically, giving it what Jelly Roll Morton memorably called "the Spanish tinge"; and classical or concert music, especially opera and salon music, which influenced it melodically. There are of course other, less important sources—for example,

klezmer music, which gave jazz the *fraylich* (or “Jewish wedding”) trumpet playing of Paul Whiteman’s Charlie Margulis and Benny Goodman’s Ziggy Elman.

Brass bands were common in New Orleans from the Civil War on. It was from the marches played by the bands that rags, and such early jazz standards as “Fidgety Feet” and “Original Dixieland One-Step,” derived their multistrain form, in which the key of the later strain (or strains) has one or more flats than that of the first strain. Also, the polyphonic structure of the early jazz ensemble—trumpet playing lead, clarinet elaborating an obbligato above, trombone providing a rhythmic foundation and occasional countermelodies—is taken from that of the marching band. Finally, certain famous bandsmen exerted a powerful influence on the development of jazz instrumental technique. Vic Dickenson, Miff Mole, and Trummy Young all declared their indebtedness to the records of Sousa’s solo trombonist Arthur Pryor, from which they learned a *cantabile* trombone style that had no precedent in the European orchestral tradition.

When Morton spoke of “the Spanish tinge,” he singled it out as one of the stylistic traits of jazz that distinguished it from (and made it superior to) ragtime. But John Storm Roberts has argued convincingly, in *The Latin Tinge* (1979), that the Latin American influence on American popular and dance music can be traced several decades before the first rags—in some mid-nineteenth-century piano pieces by Louis Moreau Gottschalk that have a Cuban habanera bass but that also anticipate ragtime in their phrasing. Far from being incidental, unrelated episodes, the tango craze of 1913, the rumba craze of the 1930s, and the subsequent development of Latin jazz have all been part of a long and steadily increasing Latin influence on American popular music. Recent research by Christopher Washburne (*Black Music Research Journal*, Spring 1997) shows that certain basic jazz rhythmic patterns are probably derived from Latin American music, and perhaps ultimately from Africa. The slave trade continued, though illicitly, in Cuba until the end of the nineteenth century, and Latin American slave owners were far more tolerant of their slaves’ native music than were slave owners in this country. Therefore genuine survivals from African music are more likely to have been preserved in Latin America.

The three greatest early jazz musicians to have recorded extensively, Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and Jelly Roll Morton, have all testified to the influence of opera and, in Morton’s case at least, other forms of concert music in the formation of their styles. As

Joshua Berrett has shown (*Musical Quarterly*, Summer 1992), it was from opera singers that Armstrong learned the high-flown bravura style that set him apart from the simpler and more straightforward New Orleans cornetists trained solely in the brass band tradition. Moreover, he interpolated in many of his recorded solos passages from favorite operatic arias and ensembles. Among the first records he acquired, as a teenager, were ones by Caruso, Tetrizzini, and Galli-Curci. Such slightly younger New Orleans cornetists as Sharkey Bonano, Wingy Manone, and Louis Prima have often been singled out as disciples of Armstrong—which they surely were. But it has been suggested that some of the similarities between their playing and his may be due to the fact that their Italian heritage gave them easy access to the same operatic music that influenced him, as well as to Neapolitan songs and salon music.

Bechet was a Creole, and his family was much better off than Armstrong's. As a child, he was often taken by his mother to New Orleans's French Opera House. His earliest recordings, like Armstrong's, are marked by a highly dramatic bravura style that clearly shows the influence of opera. He too bought Caruso's records, and in later years he liked to tell people that it was from Caruso that he got his pronounced and highly individual vibrato. The same influence operated on other New Orleans clarinetists as well—not only on the white players of Italian descent, such as Leon Roppolo and Charlie Cordilla, but also on the blacks: Omer Simeon, Jimmie Noone, Barney Bigard, Johnny Dodds. That Armstrong sensed he had a stronger affinity with the clarinetists than with his fellow cornetists is proven by his comment in a 1970 BBC interview: "I was like a clarinet player, like the guys run up and down the horn nowadays, boppin' and things."

In the recordings he made for the Library of Congress in 1938, Jelly Roll Morton fondly recalls his visits to the French Opera House: "I remember the old building very well, there on Royal Street." And he plays the "Miserere" from Verdi's *Il trovatore*, first straight and then as he "transformed" it to jazz. "Jazz music is strictly music," he insists at one point. "You have the finest ideas from the greatest operas, symphonies, and overtures in jazz music. There's nothing finer than jazz music because it comes from everything of the finest class music."

Morton certainly did not mean that jazz musicians should literally copy this or that classical piece—as some of them in fact were doing during the 1930s, when "swinging the classics" was all the rage. His

stress on what he repeatedly called “transformation” and his proud claim that “I transformed every style to mine” suggest rather that jazz could benefit by borrowing, and adapting, techniques and turns of phrase from any worthy musical source. In the elaborately graceful melodic circumlocutions of both his published compositions and his improvised solos and backgrounds on his records, we can clearly hear the operatic airs and nineteenth-century salon pieces that lie behind them and that he undoubtedly played often during his early days, in the bordellos of Storyville. In the Library of Congress recordings he also claims to have “transformed” the different dances of an old quadrille into the successive strains of “Tiger Rag,” and he plays the dances one after another: introduction, waltz, mazurka, “two-four time” (polka<sup>2</sup>), and so on. His claim was false: “Tiger Rag” was indeed based, at least in part, on an old quadrille, but it apparently had been worked out by a trombonist named Jack Carey. Nonetheless, Morton’s mastery of the different dance forms, as well as their influence on his jazz playing and composition, is evident in his graceful, fluent performance.

In the eighteenth century, the German philosopher Herder maintained that folksongs and folk poetry sprang spontaneously from the creative genius of an entire people. Historians have often represented jazz more as a product of the spirit of New Orleans blacks, the natural and inevitable expression of a particular *Volksgeist*, than as a musical style gradually and consciously developed by individual artists. From the beginning—or so the legend runs—jazz was collectively improvised, rather than composed and written down, because collective improvisation expressed the spontaneity and communal spirit that distinguished blacks from whites. The sensibility of the early jazz musician, the sort of figure long symbolized by the mysterious Buddy Bolden, was seen as having been shaped primarily by atavistic memories of African music and by direct experience of its American descendants: field hollers, country blues, work songs, and the like.

Yet the men who actually created jazz were not only surrounded from birth, as listeners, by Western tonal music; they also made their living by playing it. In the New Orleans of the 1890s, dance orchestras, both black and white, had to be able to play a variety of dances: waltzes, polkas, schottisches, mazurkas. As ragtime became popular, in the mid-1890s, these dances were joined by the two-step, which had become the dance that went with ragtime tunes, and which was itself edged out by the one-step in about 1912.

Of course the black musicians of the 1890s and early 1900s rec-

ognized the differences between their ragtime or jazz numbers and the other sorts of dance music they played. But there is no evidence that they regarded jazz as superior, or improvisation as more “natural” to them as black musicians. In fact, jazz seems not to have been improvised at first—at least in the city of New Orleans, as distinguished from outlying rural areas. The members of the pre-1890 dance and brass bands in the city were trained musicians who could read music and were proud of it. In the mid-1890s, when some bands began to take in players who could not read and so preferred to improvise, these bands were looked down on and their music was spoken of scornfully, by the older, trained players, both black and white, as “head music” or “ratty music.”

The emphasis laid by many writers on jazz’s African origins has taught us to think of it as a rare and delicate hothouse plant, different in kind from the hardy indigenous growth surrounding it. The borrowings from other types of music that we have been tracing have therefore been regarded by jazz historians with suspicion. They have often voiced the fear that jazz would be (or already had been) tainted or distorted by non-African, specifically European, elements. This view appears in its most extreme form in Rudi Blesh’s *Shining Trumpets* (1946). “The dilution and deformation of jazz,” writes Blesh, “took place from 1920 on because of the influences of commercialism, white playing, and sophistication of the Negroes themselves.” By the mid-1940s, Blesh felt, this process had “advanced to the point where the music frequently ceases to be predominantly a Negro form, becoming a hybridized popular music rather than a fine-art form” (6).

Ever since jazz began to be taken seriously, the conviction that it either will be or already has been tainted or deformed has thus sent critics and historians off on a quest for the unadulterated archetype: absolutely pure black (which usually means New Orleans) jazz. Blesh rendered this goal by definition unattainable: since we have no black jazz recorded before 1920, all the jazz we can possibly know is already tainted. Other historians, less pessimistic, have claimed to find this perfectly pure black jazz in records by Armstrong or Morton or King Oliver. But it doesn’t matter where they claimed to find it: it wasn’t there. For the quest itself is misconceived, and its goal is a chimera, a logical construction devised to justify a particular sort of musical taste. The music we call jazz has always been “a hybridized popular music,” developing in the midst of, borrowing from, and influencing other forms of popular music, including opera. Jazz also happens, however, to have quickly developed into “a fine-art form.” For

sometimes, though not very often, popular art really does, suddenly and mysteriously, attain the status of high art. Though the quest for the pure unsullied archetype has graced such august fields of inquiry as Homeric studies and the history of so-called Gregorian chant, it should simply be given up as a bad job.

Jazz's borrowings from other sorts of European music were the most natural thing in the world and should neither be wondered at nor deplored as signs of the dilution or deformation of a music once pure and perfect. Jazz was and is and always will be a hybrid, just as the music of Beethoven or Wagner or Stravinsky, at any and every stage of his career, is a hybrid. No one creates music (or anything else) in a vacuum, uninfluenced by the world around him. The task of the critic or historian lies not in unearthing (or simply positing) some pure and original form of the music that confronts him but rather in deciphering (so to speak) its genetic code. The fact that jazz was, from its beginnings, the particular hybrid that it was and is merely follows from, and further confirms, its status as a member of the large family of tonally based European musics.



## Ragtime Then and Now

*Max Morath*

Ragtime's story is one of many chapters. The opening chapter tracks this unruly American music as it coalesced in the late nineteenth century from undocumented folk origins. Early performers and composers left few fragments of their life and times, which have long since taken on a mythic quality. Urban tenderloins and a scruffy infant show business intersected a vigorous black culture, and a richly syncopated new music was spawned. Like other upheavals in popular music to come, it bubbled up from young people on hard times.

By chapter two ragtime had merged with commerce, and as the century turned, sheet music and piano rolls appeared, along with periodicals and trade papers, copyright files and primitive recordings. Research materials become accessible, although little historical scholarship was brought to bear at the time. Ragtime was scorned by the Establishment as ephemeral at best, trashy at worst.

The story of ragtime in chapter three is one of rise and fall. By 1910 or so ragtime had taken over the ballooning new industry called Popular Music. New styles of song and dance had usurped the name of ragtime, if not its musical imperatives. To public and publisher,



Painting of Scott Joplin. Courtesy of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

ragtime had come to label the times as well as the music. Decades later the novelist E. L. Doctorow would wisely employ the seven-letter word to stamp the entire era in *Ragtime* (1974).

By chapter four ragtime had become a quaint and crotchety elder. After 1920 the best of the young musicians reveled in ragtime's offspring, now labeled either "jazz," (James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Earl Hines), or "novelty" (Zez Confrey, Pauline Alpert, Roy Bargy). Publishers seldom reprinted the great old rags, although attics and piano benches still bulged with original copies, to the delight of future collectors. A few kid piano players still assayed Scott Joplin's intimidating "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899), but ragtime was nostalgia—your daddy's derby, your mama's hobble skirt.

The current chapter of the ragtime story is, happily, open-ended. It began in mid-century as pianists, collectors, and scholars first revisited the earlier chapters. It climaxed in the early 1970s when the entire nation, it seemed, rose to embrace the life and work of one of the master figures, Scott Joplin.

Origins of the word *rag* are unclear. Most scholars agree it probably evolved in the argot of nineteenth-century black culture, referring derisively to tunes or songs outside the gospel canon. Itinerant pianists combined them—dance tunes, marches, a few blues—into multi-phrase pieces called rags. The suffix *time* was added, as in "waltz time" or "march time." Sheet music from this early period discloses a rapid mutation: *Rag Time* became *Rag-Time*, then lower-case *rag-time*. The hyphen soon disappeared, and *ragtime* took over for good. The little noun *rag* lived on, of course, to identify, then as now, a specific piece of syncopated piano music.

As music for piano, a rag can be described rather precisely. It consists of three or four related sixteen-measure themes in duple time, the left hand maintaining a steady marchlike beat, the right hand layering syncopated figures above it. Today's perception of ragtime is generally thus defined, because the music has been viewed almost exclusively through the piano works of Scott Joplin. The rediscovery of this pioneer master has somehow deflected public and media interest in the larger story. Ragtime in its prime had abandoned strict musical parameters and became the term covering most of the popular music of its time. To revisit it solely as piano music is to ignore not only its other musical forms but its elusive role as a social force. If nothing else it represented a powerful vortex that swept black and white society and culture into a wary and often bitter partnership that enriched a century of American music.

## Ragtime Piano

The piano takes center stage in both early and late chapters of the ragtime story, which have in common the respected figure of Scott Joplin (1868–1917). Joplin was born in northeastern Texas, near what is now Texarkana. His father was an ex-slave from North Carolina, his mother a freeborn woman from Kentucky. The Joplins, according to Edward A. Berlin's definitive biography *King of Ragtime* (1994), were a musical family and provided their son a rudimentary musical education. Joplin left home in his early teens to enter the rough world of show business as pianist, singer, and cornetist. He was probably among the young players at the Chicago World's Fair in 1892–93. In 1894 Joplin moved to Sedalia, Missouri, where he studied music at the new George R. Smith College, and where the semiretired music dealer John Stark published "Maple Leaf" (1899) and soon thereafter formed John Stark & Sons, the company that for years would set publication standards for piano ragtime. "Maple Leaf" was an immediate success, although it did not "sell a million copies the first year," as often claimed in Joplin blurbs. But whatever its initial sale, it was ragtime's first hit, and has remained so for a century. More than that, it established the matrix for hundreds of rags to come—the theme sequence AABBAACDD, which with some variation prevailed for years. Most composers in the vital Stark catalog conformed to it, including James Scott, Arthur Marshall, Artie Matthews, and Joseph Lamb, as did most composers with major midwestern and New York houses.

John Stark and Scott Joplin moved operations to St. Louis in 1901, inaugurating a creative period during which Joplin published over a dozen rags, plus collaborations with other Missouri composers, including Louis Chauvin, Arthur Marshall, and Scott Hayden. He also completed his first ragtime opera, *A Guest of Honor*, the score of which has been lost, although Edward Berlin's research has proven beyond question that the work existed and was performed frequently during 1903.

With "Maple Leaf" and other early works, Joplin brought a higher level of musicianship to published ragtime. His scores regularly indicated such basics as pedaling, dynamics, and phrasing (e.g., "Leola," 1905). Syncopation across the bar line, never scored in other early rags, was a Joplin staple, seen in "Maple Leaf" and even in his earlier "Original Rags," its final theme offering a profusion of syncopated figures both inside and across the bars. Here again Joplin influenced his peers, not only in the form of the rag but in techniques of composition, especially in subtle uses of syncopation. Kansas City's James

Scott (1886–1938), another mainstay of the Stark catalog, certainly followed Joplin’s lead in form and style, although his highly pianistic rags, rampant with syncopation, are technically more demanding than Joplin’s. James Scott brought his own innovations to the style; his rags offer frequent examples of the repeated treble figures that would soon, in jazz, become known as “riffs,” as in the final theme of “Hilarity” (1910) and the trio of “Grace and Beauty” (1910).

In 1907 Scott Joplin moved to New York, where, with John Stark and other publishers, he introduced some of his finest works including “Fig Leaf Rag” (1908), “Solace—A Mexican Serenade” (1909), and “Euphonic Sounds” (1909). Joplin continued to pursue his dream of ragtime as a through-composed form of American piano music. Rags from his New York period stretch the then-accepted harmonic limits of popular music and expand the range of syncopated devices.

It is fatefully odd that Joplin’s work, the guiding influence in ragtime’s earliest days, did not enjoy continuing exposure. After the wild success of “Maple Leaf,” Joplin composed a body of rags of increasing lyrical beauty and delicate syncopation, but except for “Maple Leaf” and a couple of others, these rags remained unheralded and obscure during his lifetime. Rags with simple syncopations and facile right-hand figures were the big hits—“Wild Cherries” (1908), “Spaghetti Rag” (1910), and the perennial “12th Street Rag” (1915). The average American played and heard few of Joplin’s later rags but bought instead the more accessible rags of composers such as Charles L. Johnson, Henry Lodge, and Percy Wenrich. These composers and a hundred others learned from “Maple Leaf” and acknowledged its lead, but failed to enlarge upon it.

An exception was the Joplin protégé Joseph F. Lamb (1887–1960), first published by John Stark & Sons in 1915. Lamb composed rags all his life, and though his early output gained little attention, appearing as ragtime was already losing ground, his richly harmonized rags have played a major role in the ragtime revival.

Joplin meanwhile, remaining in New York, published his last rag, “Magnetic,” in 1914. The last ten years of his life had been dominated by efforts to mount his second opera, *Treemonisha*. Except for a lackluster staged reading, probably in 1911, it was never produced during his lifetime. Scott Joplin died on April 1, 1917.

## Ragtime in Song

It was natural that words would join music in the ardor of ragtime’s youth. But the entry of its incessant syncopations into vocal music was long blighted by the racist nature of its first vehicle, the “coon”

song, a descendant of the minstrel songs and jokes of the nineteenth century, in which African Americans are portrayed in degrading caricature. Coon songs, created by songwriters of both races, pose a difficult question: how could these songs, some quite wonderful at addressing universal themes of life and love, lampoon the very culture that inspired them? Are they worthy of our attention at all?

The answer seems to be that while coon songs themselves are quite properly collecting dust in the museums of popular culture, their endowment to American popular song was dramatic and demands consideration. Coon songs, after all, constituted *ragtime with words* and were every bit as popular in their time as instrumental rags for piano and band. While the social and emotional damage wreaked by these songs is inestimable, their impact on popular song must be gauged and is an essential chapter in the ragtime story.

The cover of 1897's "Syncopated Sandy" reveals an early glimpse of the word *ragtime*, then so new to print it was placed in quotation marks and hyphenated: "RAG-TIME." But ragtime's common presence in both vocal and piano music is clearly evidenced in this piece. The piano accompaniment is separated on two parallel systems, one "Straight," the other a modestly syncopated version labeled "RAG-TIME." The publishers boast that they have "succeeded in illustrating for the first time the absolute theory that the famous 'RAG-TIME' music . . . originated with the negroe [*sic*] and is characteristic of their people."

The words of the song, written for the famous (white) stage star May Irwin, typify the offensive nature of coon song lyrics: "There's a high-toned colored gent, a coon without a cent, his cash for clothes he spent, to outshine all coons he meant . . ." The accompanying parody is more hateful, referring to Sandy as "a bold bad nigger crook" who barely escapes "a lynchin' bee."

Ben Harney, a highly successful entertainer known in the trade as "the King of Ragtime," composed a hit coon song in 1896, "Mister Johnson, Turn Me Loose." It depicts activities supposedly stereotypical of black males—dice games and chicken stealing. But the lyrics are not as blatantly racist as those of other coon songs of the period. And their influence may be seen in a more positive light by noting Harney's innovative use of street language and idiom: "the boys was-a gamblin' with might and main, tho't I'd be a sport and be dead game"; "one fellow's point was a-Little Joe"; "don't take me to the calaboose." If a positive influence of the abrasive coon song lyrics may be said to exist, it is this role of introducing slang and the vernacular into popular song.

Several perennial survivors from the period were originally published as coon songs, including “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home” (1902), and “Ma Blushin’ Rosie” (1900). *Ma* for *my* was a common code in coon song dialect, however mild the stereotypes therein might be. The delightful 1899 hit “Hellow, Ma Baby,” long since rendered as “Hello, *My* Baby,” was originally marketed as a coon song. A handful of coon songs survive intact, shorn of their racist tone. Most of them are the work of black writers and composers in the New York theater world of the period.

Syncopation, under the name of either ragtime or jazz, has been notoriously tardy in reaching the Broadway musical stage. But in its broad sense, as an energizing force affecting American musical culture at every level, its liberating spirit shines in the music and lyrics of early black musicals such as *In Dahomey* (Will Marion Cook, Alex Rogers, Bert Williams, George Walker, Jess Shipp), the first black musical to play a major Broadway theater (1903), *Rufus Rastus* (Ernest Hogan and Will Vodery, 1905), and *Shoo-Fly Regiment* (Bob Cole, Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson, 1907). The songs from these shows may have been perceived as coon songs by their largely white audiences, but they were consistently free from vicious stereotype and mean language. Viewed almost a century later, having now cast off the mask of burnt cork, the best of these songs are still performed. They are songs rich in irony and humor that speak, as all good songs should, for everyone.

## The Ragtime Dances

A new name usually attaches itself to popular music when the style, especially the *beat*, changes and a new dance craze results. Ragtime for years had been characterized by a steady beat in duple time, at a relatively relaxed “Slow March Tempo.” Couples, if dancing at all, did the tiresome two-step or a timid cakewalk.

Then the breezy one-steps took over, first the turkey trot, then dozens of copycats—the bunny hug and camel walk, the snake dip and kangaroo hop. Tempo was upped, and the new dances offered couples an easy walk around step which was accomplished, shockingly, in prolonged embrace. Alas, no snappy generic name emerged, so these dances remained “ragtime,” although tempo and texture had changed dramatically. This was surely the music that Irving Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” was playing in 1911, and the dance young Americans were flaunting in Berlin’s other 1911 hit, “Everybody’s Doin’ It”: “See that *ragtime* couple over there, watch them throw their shoulders in the air.” The name adhered, but the

up-tempo music, with little space for syncopation, was a distant cousin of the ragtime that preceded it—either the funky folk rags of the late nineteenth century or the graceful, deeply syncopated piano works of Scott Joplin and his peers.

The ragtime dance mania appears to have been a creature of Tin Pan Alley and white society, but its roots can be traced to black folk dances such as the eagle rock, the buzzard lope, and for that matter, a proto turkey trot, in evidence by that name at the Chicago World's Fair.

In 1914 the team of Vernon and Irene Castle became national celebrities as they undertook to refine and codify the one-step. They mellowed the dance toward a gentrified fox-trot, which then joined the waltz on the basic ballroom dance card for years. The Castles were closely linked to New York's ragtime community, relying on the eminent black conductor James Reese Europe and drawing heavily on material by leading black composers, including Luckey Roberts, Ford Dabney, and Chris Smith. They also tapped the already astonishing output of a young Irving Berlin, for decades to come the master of the American musical moment. It may be hard to find syncopation in Berlin's *music* at this stage, but he had become a wizard at devising *lyrics* in syncopated slang and internal rhyme. And in 1917, when a new label for American popular music finally surfaced, it was Berlin who led the pack with the neatly syncopating "Mr. Jazz Himself." Americans, after taking time out to fight in a European war, would now enter a new era named for its music. By 1920 the Ragtime Years had given way to the Jazz Age.

## The Revival

The image of ragtime today reveals an odd contradiction. The allure of infant ragtime was the *beat*. The insistent, sometimes harsh syncopations against the beat were elating, almost subversive. Our renewed attraction to ragtime is *not* to its beat. Perhaps after years of pop music's energy we are surfeited; ours has been the Century of the Beat. So ragtime in its rediscovery—Joplin's ragtime—has instead charmed us with its grace and beauty. Joplin, unlike most other composers of piano ragtime, gave us melody. Most of his rags except the galloping "Maple Leaf" are actually songs—without words. They're still *rags*, of course. Insistent syncopations underpin his melodies and are *of* them, not appended to them. But the visceral excitement evoked by ragtime's two-beat is missing in the revival. We anoint Joplin and ignore his contemporaries, whose sturdy and stomping rags

lack his felicity. We're somehow wary of the fun—the *rush* that ragtime's rampant rhythms offer. We still visit them, but mainly in the pizza parlor or the saloon. Only Joplin has made it to the concert hall and NPR.

Whatever the scope of the rediscovery of ragtime, it came as no surprise to the small cadre of devotees who kept watch during ragtime's fifty-year hibernation. Publication of *They All Played Ragtime* by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis (1950) signaled the first surge of rediscovery and has informed the movement ever since. In the 1950s a few reprint folios of the early rags began to appear. Bernard Kalban, a leading New York editor and one of the industry's few unswerving friends of ragtime, saw to it that rags in the old Mills Music catalog were made available, and also those of the pioneer New York firm of Edward B. Marks (formerly Joseph W. Stern & Co.). Audio recordings had been rare, generally issued on small, hard-to-find labels, although rags in honky-tonk style occasionally came along on major labels. Then the San Francisco pianist Wally Rose began recording some real gems of ragtime, and by the 1960s pianists of various disciplines were following suit. In the early 1970s Joshua Rifkin's all-Joplin LPs, in their scrupulous attention to notation and dynamics, brought a classical flavor to the rags. Moreover, since they were released on the prestigious Nonesuch label, these albums triggered a marketing breakthrough, and Joplin's ragtime finally found its way into the classical bins of the nation's record stores. Musicians of every stripe have since embraced Joplin, including André Previn, the Canadian Brass, James Levine, and the Boston Pops.

The Joplin boom—there is no other word for it—reverberated elsewhere in early 1972. The Joplin opera *Treemonisha* premiered in Atlanta, mounted by the superb team of Robert Shaw and Katherine Dunham, with orchestrations by the composer-musicologist T. J. Anderson, based on Joplin's piano score. *Treemonisha* was again staged by the Houston Grand Opera in May of 1975 and was brought to Broadway that October; the production undoubtedly contributed to Joplin's being posthumously awarded a special Pulitzer Prize in 1976 for his contribution to American music.

Other hit recordings had meanwhile appeared. Students of the New England Conservatory under Gunther Schuller revived stock orchestrations of Joplin pieces on *The Red Back Book of Rags* (1973). Similar settings were then employed by composer-arranger Marvin Hamlisch for the soundtrack of the hit movie *The Sting*, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1974. Hamlisch accepted another Oscar

for best score, after a gracious bow to the Joplin legacy. The film's main theme, an obscure Joplin rag called "The Entertainer," became a hit record and remains today a prime teaching piece for beginning piano students. With the Joplin renaissance leading the way, ragtime research and rediscovery burgeoned. Dozens of books, recordings, and reprint folios now provide access to a wide range of piano scores and ragtime lore; new ragtime compositions receive respect and performance on many levels; ragtime festivals dot the nation, drawing the faithful in ever-growing numbers.

Ragtime, then, has lived several lives under its own name. But its musical *essence* has pervaded a century of popular music. Ragtime, after all, meant syncopations against the beat. Always to sing or play *on* the beat was to be "square"—caught, as Webster's Second puts it, in "a markedly regular rhythmic form; as a *square* melody." *Square*, of course, came to mean out of style, quaint. To play or sing "square" implied the same thing—old-fashioned, tired, not *hip*.

Ragtime changed the rules. Musicians and singers, remaining always aware of the beat, began to sing and play around it. We take this freedom for granted today, but when we listen to singers and players recorded early in the century, we are amazed at how "square" their delivery is. They are *on* the beat. The ragtime kids took the notes off the page and off the beat and minted a new American way with music. The imperative? Keep the beat in your head or your hands or your heart, and do anything you please ahead of it or behind it, inside or outside it. Ragtime, then, viewed large, was the fountainhead of every rhythmic and stylistic upheaval that has followed, in a century of ever-evolving American popular music.



## The Early Origins of Jazz

*Jeff Taylor*

**I**n March of 1917 the New York–based Victor Records released a single disc by the Original Dixieland Jass Band, a group of white musicians from New Orleans. The band had been in the city since January of that year, after a successful run in Chicago, and the two tunes they recorded, “Livery Stable Blues” and “Dixieland Jass Band One Step,” are usually considered the first recordings of jazz. The record, joined by several more in the following months, created an international sensation and sold at least a quarter million copies. Just two years later, with jazz securely rooted in the national consciousness, the vocalist Creighton Thompson could exclaim: “Jazz, jazz, jazz, that’s all I want to do; Play me a little jazz!”

Though the Original Dixieland Jass Band (or ODJB) recordings were, ironically, not made by the African Americans who had been jazz’s primary creators, and though some scholars have claimed that the band’s music lacked elements that define the tradition (improvisation and, to a large extent, the powerful but elusive rhythmic groove known as “swing feeling”), the issue of the discs was a watershed event in the music’s history. They gave the public at large its first taste of this refreshing new music and inspired legions of younger musicians to explore the art. Yet if these performances



The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 1917. Left to right: Tony (Sbarbaro) Spargo, drums; Eddie Edwards, trombone; Nick LaRocca, cornet; Larry Shields, clarinet; Henry Ragas, piano. Courtesy Frank Driggs Collection.

provided the cornerstone of a rich body of recorded music, they also came at the end of an initial period of jazz's development; they represented the culmination of a musical story that had been unfolding for at least the previous three decades.

Unfortunately, investigating the evolution of this distinctively American musical language has proven a frustrating and treacherous path. Scholars and listeners are constantly faced with the vexing fact that jazz in its infancy was never recorded on disc; as a result, whatever is written or said about the actual *sound* of this early music must inevitably remain conjecture. The necessity of relying on the often conflicting testimony of musicians and listeners who were present during the birth of jazz, and the temptation to extrapolate features of early jazz from later recordings (such as those made in 1923 by King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band), have given rise to a variety of myths and rumors about the origins of the music. Though these myths often contain valuable insights, they have perpetuated an oversimplified view of jazz's early history.

In the most prevalent of these myths, jazz was created by mostly untrained musicians in New Orleans around the turn of the century. In 1917, after a period of gestation in New Orleans's red light district of Storyville, the music began to spread north, as jazz musicians were forced by stringent vice laws to seek employment elsewhere. Jazz then moved up the Mississippi to Chicago, and from there, in the late 1920s, to New York.

In the past twenty years, jazz scholars from a variety of disciplines have substantially revised this tale by reevaluating oral histories, studying related repertoires, and examining largely uninvestigated sources (such as census records, newspapers, and documents related to the Works Project Administration). For one thing, though the primacy of New Orleans in the development of jazz is irrefutable, a variety of syncopated styles and repertoires, ones related to but distinct from the ragtime and "country blues" traditions, are now known to have evolved in other regions of the country during jazz's formative years. In New York, Chicago, the Southwest, and even the West Coast, African-American popular music traditions both maintained a regional flavor and incorporated elements of the New Orleans style as it was disseminated in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As they did so, the effect may not have been so much one of "jazzing" a previously "nonjazz" repertoire (as has been often suggested) but of fostering the creation of an entirely new idiom. The result was the bewildering variety of styles and ensembles heard on recordings of

the 1920s, many of which have been long accepted as part of the jazz “canon.”

The evocative tales of jazz’s origins in brothels have been largely refuted as well, for though jazz has for a good part of its history maintained a relationship with prostitution and other illicit activities, most of the early jazz players found employment in social, civic, and cultural events outside the red light districts. Research into the musical repertoires and styles that went into the making of jazz has also helped dismiss the idea that the music was created mainly by musically illiterate players. The evocative image of the “natural” jazz talent who plays entirely by ear was promoted early in the history of the music (by the members of the ODJB, among others) and was partly responsible for the music’s immediate appeal. But many of the early players were, in fact, readers, and notated music in the form of written arrangements and lead sheets formed a fundamental part of the music’s history.

One of the most important discoveries has concerned the early dissemination of the music. It is now known that New Orleans musicians were touring outside their home city even in the early formative years of jazz. Between 1907 and 1910, for example, pianist Jelly Roll Morton traveled extensively throughout the South and Midwest. By 1911 pianist Tony Jackson was having an important impact on Chicago’s music scene, and scholar Lawrence Gushee has placed other New Orleans musicians in California as early as 1908. And, as Gushee points out, there is reason to believe other New Orleans musicians ventured far from home during the early days of jazz. Though there is no way to know precisely what style of music these players were performing, one suspects they both influenced the local musicians who heard them and picked up new ideas themselves along the way.

If recent scholars have refuted many of the established jazz myths, they have not yet replaced them with a cohesive story of their own. As jazz historiography continues to widen its scope, many more important discoveries will no doubt be made. In the meantime, the most one may do is to delve into the rich tapestry of social, economic, and musical factors that helped foster this art form, and hope to do justice to the hundreds of artists, many forgotten and unrecorded, who first gave jazz to the world.

## The Word

It is not clear when the term *jazz* (or its early variants, *jaz* and *jass*) first came into existence, but its first known appearance in print was

in a 1913 sports column of a San Francisco newspaper, with its application to a specific musical style coming two years later (in a reference to a white New Orleans group led by Tom Brown). A variety of theories have been suggested about the etymology of the term *jazz*: the word has variously been traced to earlier African and Creole terms and to the French verb *jaser* (to chatter). The word may also have roots in a verbal form (to “jazz something up” or to “jazz around”) as a reference, perhaps, to the energetic styles of the early players and their tendency to deviate from a printed score or established musical routine. Most famously, it has been suggested that the word is a slang term for the sex act and related to the word *orgasm* or *gism* (semen). This last theory was certainly responsible for several musicians’ steadfast avoidance of the term in describing their own music; yet such an origin has never been proven.

But even if scholars could definitively trace the origins of the word itself, there would still remain the problem of its application during the early days of the music, when there was no single repertory universally accepted by the general public as jazz (a quandary which has, to some extent, remained to the present day). Until the end of the 1920s (and perhaps even later) the term *jazz* was applied rather indiscriminately to any peppy, danceable repertory, from the songs of Irving Berlin to the raggy pyrotechnics of the “novelty” pianists. And after jazz became an international phenomenon in the late teens, the term was exploited (as was the term *blues*) as a potent advertising gimmick for the expanding recording and sheet music industries, one often applied to products whose connection to the jazz tradition was tenuous at best.

Nevertheless, for many *musicians* there was an important difference between jazz and other repertoires, even in the earliest days of the music’s dissemination. Though their stories conflict as to what made the tradition unique, performers such as pianist James P. Johnson, pianist, composer, and bandleader Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, and trumpeter Adolphus “Doc” Cheatham reserved the term *jazz* for a specific style, one distinct from the other popular musics being performed in the teens. Through imaginative research, Lawrence Gushee has supported the claim that what many musicians called *jazz* before around 1920 might more accurately be considered a type of instrumental ragtime from New Orleans, one with a distinctly regional flavor lent by that city’s unique musical culture. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe this music as not quite ragtime and not yet jazz; it was an elusive transitional music that would not begin to emerge as a cohesive tradition until great black jazz artists

such as Morton, King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong began to record in the early 1920s.

## Setting the Stage

If the sound of early jazz (or, perhaps more accurately, “prejazz”) remains elusive, much may be learned about the creation of the music by placing it within the context of turn-of-the-century America. As historian Thomas Hennessey and others have shown, jazz was from its earliest days both a great art form and a commercial commodity. And like all musics, it directly reflected the complex social environment in which it was forged. The early history of jazz encompasses not just the development of a new musical idiom but the evolution of a society in which that idiom could flourish.

Given the sketchy nature of the evidence, beginning the story of jazz in a specific year (1890) may seem suspicious and arbitrary. But there are several excellent reasons for starting the tale here. For one thing, the last decade of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a radical shift in population patterns in the United States, with the country moving from a rural to an urban culture. In 1890, only 35 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities, but over the following years the number increased dramatically. With the development of cities came the growth of the theatrical and music publishing industries.

On a more specific level, it was at the end of the nineteenth century that African Americans began to move into urban areas to find work and escape the oppressive racial policies of the South. The migration would reach epic proportions in the years around World War I, but even in this earlier period profound changes began to take place in the black communities of many cities. Enclaves of African Americans, which began to boast black-owned businesses and featured a well-defined class structure within the urban context as a whole, began to take shape. It was largely (though not exclusively) within these communities that the early black jazz musicians would find employment.

Related to America’s changing demography were some radical shifts in social dancing, also taking place in the 1890s. The second half of the nineteenth century had seen a change from the “separate couple” dances of the quadrille, contradance, and cotillion to the “closed couple” dances of the waltz and polka. Near the end of the century, new closed couple dances began to emerge, ones inextricably linked to the popular music of the period (particularly ragtime), es-

pecially the two-step and turkey trot. Such developments set the stage for the intricate relationship between jazz and dance that would remain for the first fifty years of its history. Not only did playing for dancing provide the bread and butter of most early jazz musicians' careers, it exerted a dynamic influence on the music itself, as dance fads came and went and the demands of audiences changed. In addition, as dance halls, ballrooms, and cabarets competed more and more for the customer's dollar, a complex set of ties evolved between the club owners who hired the musicians and other levels of urban society—particularly organized crime.

Finally, the 1890s saw the development of mass marketing in the music industry. The explosive popularity of pieces such as Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899), and the emergence of the vastly lucrative businesses of New York's Tin Pan Alley, showed the viability of sheet music as a potent commercial product; piano rolls would follow, as would sound recordings. Without the influence of the music industry, jazz would have evolved in a much different way (if, indeed, it would have come into being at all); not only was the business responsible for bringing the music to international attention, but it created a method by which musicians could listen to and learn from each other. And the success of the music industry inspired black artists and entrepreneurs to build their own publishing and recording businesses; many of these companies, such as those led by W. C. Handy and Harry Pace, would play a significant part in the early dissemination of jazz. Some black businessmen also developed a role within the larger white-owned companies: Clarence Williams, for example, besides working as both a musician and publisher, became in the early 1920s an A&R representative for the OKeh company's race record series and was responsible for recruiting many of the artists who performed on that label.

New stylistic trends in urban African-American music at the end of the nineteenth century also helped set the stage for the creation of jazz. The most important musical traditions mined by the first generation of jazz musicians were undoubtedly ragtime and the blues. These traditions preceded jazz, but they also continued to coexist with it for much of its early history. Early jazz may, for example, be seen partly as an advanced branch of the ragtime tradition, but ragtime also maintained its own trajectory to some extent, with more "traditional" ragtime being performed and written well into the twenties. The blues, though it lent much to jazz, also continued as a discrete tradition, in both rural and urban incarnations. The creation of jazz

was not so much a matter of a few brilliant musicians selecting elements of these and other repertoires and combining them into a spicy new musical stew. Rather, jazz resulted from a complex and exciting period of cross-pollination between musicians and groups, with ragtime bands playing blues, blues musicians playing ragtime, and classically trained players exploring a host of popular music genres.

Still, specific features of ragtime and the blues may be identified in early jazz. The conceptual basis of ragtime—a heavily syncopated melodic line over a regularly accented bass rhythm—can be tied to the familiar arrangement of instruments in the early jazz ensemble, where the complex lines of the lead instruments are backed by the steady on-the-beat chording of a rhythm section. In addition, multi-strained ragtime pieces figured prominently in the repertory of most early jazz groups and continued to be a performance staple throughout the 1920s.

The blues lent jazz a specific twelve-bar form and, perhaps more important, a rich tradition of performance style that emphasized individual expression over “correct” instrumental technique. The fondness for bent pitches, for playing “between the cracks” of established Western tonality, and the variety of buzzes, growls, and scoops that are an indispensable feature of jazz’s art arose mainly from the blues tradition. The blues may also have provided a conduit for the incorporation of Latin American elements into jazz, particularly in New Orleans. Some jazz scholars have suggested that the distinctive rhythmic components of Latin American music played a role in the development of jazz “swing” feeling, and several early jazz musicians, including Jelly Roll Morton and drummer Baby Dodds, recalled that in New Orleans the blues were played slowly and with a “Spanish” feel.

## **New Orleans**

Typical features of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban landscape can be seen in New Orleans, where most of the great early jazz players were born. Yet in many ways the city was unique. Because of its status as an important port and its past ownership by both the French and the Spanish, the city boasted an ethnic diversity perhaps unmatched in any other city of its time; besides the strong European influence, the city had a distinctive Caribbean flavor. In addition, New Orleans was arguably the most musical city in the

country, with a rich tradition of both classical and vernacular styles that stretched back to the eighteenth century.

New Orleans for most of its history maintained a distinctive racial climate. Slaves were allowed the freedom to maintain some of their African-based rituals, as well as the accompanying music, when many of these traditions had been strongly repressed in other areas of the South; indeed, slave celebrations in so-called Congo Square were known to continue well into the nineteenth century. In addition, New Orleans boasted an influential population of Creoles, American-born people of Spanish or French descent. A subset of this group—the so-called black Creoles or Creoles of color—played a pivotal role in the early development of jazz.

In New Orleans, as in other areas of the United States, sexual relationships frequently developed between slave owners and their female slaves, with children of mixed parentage a typical result. According to the city's Black Code of 1724, these slaves and their children could be freed and were allowed to own property. Some were given large bequests by their former owners. As a result, many of these Creoles ran plantations of their own or established prosperous urban businesses. Their children were often sent to France for education. By the mid-1800s, the Creoles of color represented a wealthy and influential class in New Orleans; because of their history and educational background they clung steadfastly to European-based customs and culture, establishing, among other institutions, a Negro Philharmonic Society in the 1830s. For most of the nineteenth century these Creoles, from whose ranks would come great early jazzmen such as Morton, reed player Sidney Bechet, and trombonist Edward "Kid" Ory, maintained both a social and a geographic distance from the poorer black residents who lived "uptown," and whose lives were steeped in more rural-based African-American folk traditions.

In the mid-1890s, as New Orleans's racial codes were revised, increased (and often reluctant) contact between the black Creoles and the "uptown" blacks began to take place. Oral histories suggest that these associations brought together the musical strands that contributed to jazz: from the Creoles came written traditions of classical music, European-style dances, and ragtime, and from the blacks the rich oral tradition of folk music and the blues. Certainly the truth was far less tidy; not all Creoles were grounded in European music (Sidney Bechet never learned to read music well, for example), and some "uptown" blacks did boast skill in written traditions. In addition, the role played by white musicians in New Orleans (such as

bandleader “Papa” Jack Laine, who hired black musicians for his group) has been largely ignored, even though many natives of the city (the Sicilian-Americans who made up the ODJB, for example) were active on the popular music scene.

Many early jazz musicians have remarked, however, that as the musical styles of Creoles and blacks began to interact changes were felt in New Orleans’s performing ensembles. Music was deeply integrated into the fabric of the city’s life, and a variety of activities—social gatherings, political rallies, religious events—were accompanied by ensembles of different sizes and instrumentations, which provided work for musicians of many tastes and backgrounds. Several types of ensembles boasted a long history in the area, and their character and repertory were guided by their audiences and the context in which they played. They may be gathered into three general categories, though the boundaries between them remained somewhat fluid. The most informal ensembles were the combos that performed in the seedier cabarets and bars of the red light district; these were small groups that were often built around a pianist. Jelly Roll Morton, who frequently played in this context, recalls that the repertory of these groups consisted largely of slow blues and more up-tempo, rag-like stomps and “honky-tonk numbers.” Better known were the brass marching bands, which would perform for public gatherings, picnics, funerals, and a variety of other events; these groups specialized in traditional marching music but also began to incorporate rags and blues into their performances during the early 1900s. The final category, loosely gathered under the heading of “dance bands,” often included string instruments and played for dances, parties, and other social functions. The repertory varied widely, and clearly had to be adaptable to a variety of performance venues. The musically literate, high-class “society orchestra” led by violinist John Robichaux (a black Creole) specialized in written arrangements of popular dance music (especially waltzes, two-steps, cakewalks, and marches), while the rougher, less-trained group led by black cornetist Buddy Bolden specialized in the blues.

Though each of these ensemble types played a role in the gradual evolution of jazz in New Orleans, there is evidence that the dance bands provided the most fertile breeding ground for the new music. According to eyewitnesses, during the early 1900s many of these groups began to incorporate the looser, improvisatory, more blues-inflected “ratty” style of playing associated with “uptown” blacks, which, though not yet jazz, struck an exciting chord with many

younger musicians. Bolden's group, in particular, requires comment in this regard, for the cornetist enjoyed wide celebrity during the formative years of jazz. Though Bolden's professional career was quite brief (he led his first group in the mid-1890s and by 1907 was forced by mental illness to stop performing) he had a profound effect on New Orleans musical life. His ensemble, which in 1901 included cornet, clarinet, valve trombone, guitar, bass, and drums, helped set a standard for New Orleans jazz instrumentation, while his powerful tone and passionate feel for the blues inspired a generation of younger New Orleans musicians. Perhaps more important, he is reported to have played with a distinctive and very personal rhythmic feel, perhaps prefiguring the infectious "swing" that would characterize the work of later jazz musicians. In addition, his talent for melodic decoration—though it fell short of true improvisation—encouraged younger musicians to develop a freer, more spontaneous approach to established repertory.

As noted earlier, there are no recordings of Bolden's group nor of any other New Orleans ensemble during the early history of jazz. But a few recordings provide hints to the general characteristics of their music and the rich cultural life from which it emerged. First there are the 1917 performances of the ODJB. The members of this group had been immersed from childhood in the exciting music scene of their hometown, and though they may have altered their performance style to fit the demands of the commercial marketplace (especially after their tours of Chicago and New York), their recordings do suggest some of the essential features of New Orleans jazz. In a performance such as "Livery Stable Blues," for example, one immediately notes the free (almost anarchic) approach to instrumental technique and tone color, as the musicians proceed through a catalog of bent notes, swoops, and vibratos (not to mention animal sounds) that would make a classical musician shudder. In addition, the densely polyphonic texture—cornet playing lead, trombone supplying a bass line, and clarinet embroidering above—captures at least the spirit of the collective improvisation common in the early New Orleans bands (even if a close listening shows that the ODJB's instrumental lines were clearly preplanned).

Another important recorded document comes from a decade after the first ODJB recordings. In 1927, in New Orleans, Columbia recorded eight performances by Sam Morgan's Jazz Band. Most of the members of this ensemble had never traveled outside of New Orleans and its environs and had remained relatively untouched by the

constantly shifting musical trends of Chicago and New York. Therefore, the recordings may very well capture the sound of the early black New Orleans jazz bands. Though the group engages in a great deal of collective improvisation on these recordings, one is immediately struck by the relaxed, four-to-the-bar feel of the rhythm section and by the warm tone color of the featured instrumentalists, especially Sam and Ike Morgan on cornet. The effect provides a potent contrast to the frenetic tempos of the ODJB and may well signify a crucial element in early jazz: a passion and personal expressiveness brought on by a profound feeling for the blues.

Finally there remain the attempts made by several New Orleans musicians to re-create (often at a distance of several decades) the music they heard and played during the early days of jazz. Though some of these recordings (such as those made in the 1940s by trumpeter Bunk Johnson) have proved unreliable as historical documents, Jelly Roll Morton's 1938 recollections for Alan Lomax at the Library of Congress (now easily available on modern reissue) remain a rich lode of information. Morton's braggadocio was legendary, and his claims are occasionally contradicted by modern scholarship; nevertheless, his reminiscences (peppered throughout by sung passages and illustrations at the piano) vividly portray the sheer variety of music that captured the ears of the first generation of New Orleans jazz musicians, from rags and quadrilles to blues, popular songs, and operatic excerpts. And his attempts to re-create earlier styles in performance, though they are always laced with Morton's very personal musical voice, give glimpses of some of early twentieth-century New Orleans's most intriguing musical personalities.

### **Other Locales**

New Orleans certainly gave a new musical idiom to the rest of the world and may have provided the catalyst for the creation of jazz. Yet other areas in the country, both urban and rural, played a crucial role in the early history of the music. New York had by the late nineteenth century become the center of America's entertainment industry. The city's thriving black theater scene, with its deft blending of blues, ragtime, operetta, and popular song, not only provided employment for many musicians who would later make their mark in jazz but established in its pit orchestras a musical tradition that was ripe for the incorporation of New Orleans music. In addition, James Reese Europe's group, though it performed social dance music and not jazz, set a standard for ensemble playing and was an impor-

tant progenitor of the city's jazz orchestras of the twenties. Europe's Clef Club, a booking agency and social organization founded in 1910, also strengthened the role of black musicians on the New York scene. And though they specialized in a solo repertory, stride pianists such as James P. Johnson and Luckey Roberts were at the forefront of the music's transition from a rigidly syncopated ragtime idiom to a more fluid, blues-inflected jazz style. Unlike New Orleans, the rise of new popular styles in New York was documented, though in a rather haphazard way, on sound discs and piano rolls; though most of these recordings are peripheral to jazz, they do provide a much-needed glimpse into the city's pre-jazz music scene.

Chicago's role as a center of jazz in the 1920s is well known, but ragtime and syncopated dance music were being performed in the city some time before the important early New Orleans jazz musicians began to move north. Ragtime was heard at the 1893 World's Fair, which featured several important pianists (including Scott Joplin), and in the following years the city became an important center for ragtime publishing and the production of piano rolls. An all-black branch of the musician's union, Local 208, was founded in 1902 and served as a focal point for many musicians' working lives. Beginning with the establishment of the Pekin Theater in 1905, Chicago built a thriving entertainment district centered on South State Street; within just five years several important performance venues, including the Grand, Vendome, and Monogram theaters, were in operation. In addition, by 1910 several musicians who specialized in ragtime and syncopated dance music, including Dave Peyton, Glover Compton, and Clarence M. Jones, were well established in the city. By all accounts the New Orleans musicians who traveled to Chicago (especially after 1917) took the city by storm; yet as in New York the existing black popular music scene in the city also undoubtedly influenced the evolution of jazz there. Unfortunately, no recordings of early Chicago jazz and pre-jazz exist.

Finally, though long neglected, black music performed in the so-called territories during the early part of the century has now begun to be incorporated into jazz's story. In smaller cities and rural areas throughout the South, Southwest, and Midwest, popular musical styles steeped in black vernacular traditions reached audiences largely through traveling productions known as "tent shows." The brass bands that played for these shows (as well as for after-hours dances) were patterned after military groups and played marches, blues, and rags. These ensembles provided an important training ground for

musicians who would later find their way to the important urban centers and make their mark in the jazz scene: W. C. Handy, for example, who moved to New York in 1918 and became a vital presence in the city's entertainment business, led a well-known touring brass band based in Memphis. In addition, solo pianists specializing in blues and ragtime built a performance tradition of their own throughout the territories, traveling from town to town playing in small cabarets and bars and accompanying silent films. Many of these players would later settle in Chicago and New York, where they came in contact with musicians from a variety of other backgrounds and lent their distinctive voices to an emerging music.

The story of jazz's early history will never be definitively recorded, for it is not a single narrative but many; a rich mosaic of musical voices, each with a tale to tell. Perhaps this is the music's greatest miracle: that it arose not from a single place or time but from a people, a country, and an era.



## **New York Roots: Black Broadway, James Reese Europe, Early Pianists**

*Thomas L. Riis*

**N**ew York's significance for jazz history lies in its open embrace of all things theatrical and seemingly all life forms with a dramatic or dramatizable element. Because the city possesses a long history of hospitality to the marginalized of the world—not merely twentieth-century immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, but Dutch sailors in the seventeenth century, English loyalists during the American Revolution, Atlantic pirates in search of safe haven, and all manner of scoundrels, scalawags, traders, and freebooters over the last several hundred years—its openness to unusual custom, indeed its flamboyant penchant for self-promotion, has conduced to the process of creating characters in costume, storytellers, and other citizens who work at being visible, striking, and larger than life.

Of course there was black music and drama in New York long before jazz. Musical interpolations were part and parcel of the African Grove Theatre productions in Five Points dating as far back as 1821. In the same decade free blacks “danced for eels” in Catherine Market. At the nearby Chatham Theatre such dance customs were immortalized in the landmark play *New York as It Is* twenty years later. Even before the blackface minstrel show African-American street-songs and



Lieutenant James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment Band, Hotel Tunis, Paris, 1919.  
Courtesy Frank Driggs Collection.

dances were being appropriated, reshaped, and presented in a formal dramatic context.

By the turn of the century, before Harlem became the national center of African-American culture, New York supported more actors and professional musicians connected with the stage than any other American city. The theatricalization, so to speak, of black talent continued with the minstrel show itself in 1855 (when black performers added burnt-cork makeup to enhance the “authenticity” of variety shows), commercial imitations of the wildly successful Fisk Jubilee (choral spirituals) Singers in the 1870s, and pioneering traveling companies such as the Hyers Sisters that used the spirituals and newer songs by black composers Sam Lucas and James Bland in original plays designed as realistic comedies. Then in the 1890s ragtime came to town.

In the subsequent generation when the term *jazz* (or *jass*) began to be applied to music, its link to ragtime—an African-American product originating in the Midwest—was evident. Both implied spontaneity, looseness in many senses, rhythmic novelty, vitality, and black roots. The concentration of people, the high level of activity, and the relatively freewheeling social environment in New York allowed ragtime and stomp music to flourish there. Extensive numbers of performances took place, and recording was possible. A skilled freelance musician, especially a facile note-reader, could make good money in New York. Bands abounded. Social and theatrical events of every description needed music, first ragtime and later jazz, with the latter term driving out the older one by 1920.

Whereas most famous early jazz players specialized on instruments more portable than the piano, the presence of pianos in public venues everywhere by the turn of the century made them natural partners in any kind of small ensemble music taking place in even a moderate-size concert room, dance hall, or stage. Ragtime pianists came to New York from all over the country as the craze for the new syncopated style spread between 1896 and 1916. Ragtime songs, in the easily salable and thoroughly familiar format of piano/vocal score, rose high in popularity, then ebbed as recorded instrumental jazz and blues were adopted as natural heirs to rag.

Although early stage efforts to include ragtime did not all arise in New York, the growing and theatrically receptive cities of the eastern seaboard (especially New York) noticed, mimicked, and enlarged upon the broad outlines that characterized all musical comedies of the time: a flexible format, a mixture of song types always including

the latest styles, a comic story or at least the presence of a star comedian, interpolated vernacular dances, and the avoidance of situations deemed to be inappropriate by white producers (such as a serious plot with romantic coupling, love songs, overtly tragic endings, and politically provocative dialogue) for shows with black actors.

While significant developments can be seen in such landmark shows as *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk* (1898) and those produced by Sam T. Jack's Creole Burlesque companies (1890–97), John Isham's Octoroons (1895–99), and the Black Patti Troubadours (1896–1916), the crest of popularity for shows that properly can be deemed musical comedies spanned the decade from 1898 to 1908, coincident with the rise of piano ragtime in New York and elsewhere. These shows, though produced and financially controlled by white managers, were built almost solely with black talent: young cakewalk dancers, vaudevillians, composers, directors, choreographers, comics, scriptwriters, and instrumental musicians.

Both black and white ticket buyers flocked to the best of these productions: *A Trip to Coontown* (1898), *In Dahomey* (1902–3), *Abyssinia* (1906), *The Oyster Man* (1907), *Bandanna Land* (1908), and *The Red Moon* (1909). These shows and about two dozen others during the decade were formed around three distinct creative nuclei: the cakewalking team of Bert Williams and George Walker; Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson; and Ernest Hogan, the singer-comedian advertised as “the Unbleached American” because he avoided the notorious makeup of minstrelsy. All of these performers and their companies, using original music, mounted fully staged and equipped, evening-long shows that began in New York, toured widely, and found large audiences and positive reviews. Most important, they stimulated an attitude indissolubly linked with jazz; they seemed to urge wild, spontaneous, sympathetic movement among singers, players, and audiences alike.

The most creative literate musicians whose efforts were realized in the black shows were J. Rosamond Johnson, known nowadays as the brother of intellectual James Weldon Johnson, with whom he coauthored *The Book[s] of American Negro Spirituals* (1925–26), and Will Marion Cook (1869–1944), a nearly forgotten pioneer whose assimilation of orchestral ragtime and syncopated song was crucial to the perception of his shows as distinctively modern and racial. (In *Music Is My Mistress* [1973] Duke Ellington hailed Cook as “His Majesty the King of Consonance,” deftly capturing both his important influence and his conservatism from the jazz musician's point of view.)

The songs of Johnson and Cook generally avoid the sophisticated textures and persistent multiple syncopations of Scott Joplin and his fellow classic piano rag writers, but the presence of the basic offbeat emphasis of rag, plus an unmistakable bluesy quality in the melodies of the slower ballads, marks these as African-American precursors to jazz itself, long before Gershwin, Whiteman, and Grofé developed their more famous orchestral models. That Cook's music was known to the sweet bands of New Orleans is clear from the presence of band parts for his tune "On Emancipation Day" in the John Robichaux collection of the New Orleans Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

Johnson performed at the piano in his vaudeville act, and his arrangements of spirituals, as well as contemporary witnesses, indicate that he possessed formidable keyboard skills. Cook's main instrument was the violin, and he assumed the role of conductor and musical director for many shows.

### **James Reese Europe**

One of the outstanding talents to emerge from a group of younger men who worked in the early all-black musical comedies was James Reese Europe (1881–1919). Hailing from Washington, D.C., he had grown up in the neighborhood of John Philip Sousa and studied violin and piano in a nurturing middle-class household. Forced by his father's death in 1899 to provide an income for his mother and sisters, he eventually joined his brother John, a pianist in New York, where his talents for music and leadership were quickly recognized.

He assisted with writing the music for songs to be interpolated by the Black Patti Troubadours' chief comedian, John Larkins, and had other tunes of his taken up by popular white vaudevillians. After playing in a groundbreaking concert of "syncopated" music—with Cook, he became one of the popularizers of this upscale term for ragtime—in 1905 with Ernest Hogan's Memphis Students (evidently one of the many commercial take-offs on the Fisk [Nashville students] Singers ensemble), he served as musical director in the Cole and Johnson brothers shows *The Shoo-Fly Regiment* (1906) and *The Red Moon* (1908). He also organized benefits and fund-raisers for the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association and was a member of their core leadership group known as the Frogs.

In 1910, seeing that black talent could be profitably employed in a variety of functions supported by rich socialites, Europe organized the Clef Club (and later the Tempo Club) and proceeded to develop an extraordinarily successful booking agency to supply well-outfitted

and highly professional ensembles throughout the city. He himself conducted a group called the Society Orchestra.

By 1912 he had so successfully convinced a skeptical white public of the worth of new African-American music that he was able to organize two concerts in Carnegie Hall to showcase the latest works of European-trained composers like Cook and Will Tyers. Europe's bands in the Clef Club were note-readers and straight players, but individual soloists needed little encouragement to increase the momentum and intensity, and evidently Europe gave it to them.

### **The Castles**

Europe's fame increased when his band was chosen in 1913 to accompany the young Anglo-American husband-and-wife dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle. This up-to-date, fun-loving, yet proper couple was precisely suited to the temper of the times, looking for thrills via the music of two-steps and a variety of "animal" dances (turkey trot, grizzly bear, bunny hug). Dances of the black folk—from farm, street, and dive—were transmuted and tamed through the ballroom slickness of the chic pair. Europe's polished ragtime played by bands of black performers in formal concert dress so perfectly managed to accompany these steps that they achieved an air of the mildly risqué, a naughty-but-nice novelty made to order for the white middle class aspiring to join the "smart set."

In 1914 Castle House was created as a venue in which the Castles could teach in a more intimate setting and demonstrate popular dance steps in versions made safe for genteel audience participation. This idea intensified an already phenomenal impact. Everything the couple did in the line of popular fashion was talked about and imitated. Castlemania reigned.

Their dance instruction booklet strictly forbade hopping, dipping, hip shaking, body twisting, and other suggestive or overexcited vernacular steps. But the Castles understood that the key to success was related to modern music. Fully crediting James Reese Europe with the invention of the music for the fox-trot—they liked the moderate tempo and unjerky syncopations he used in playing W. C. Handy's "Memphis Blues" for them—the Castles ultimately created this new dance as a box step with a few quick glides, skips, and kicks added. The swaying music in duple meter made the perfect substitute for all manner of tunes that had been used to accompany earlier, more ungainly steps.

Europe's fox-trots fueled the longest-lived dance craze of the first

half of the century. The fox-trot phenomenon also influenced many subsequent dance fads and later orchestras, such as Paul Whiteman's, which were associated with jazz. More important, it represented the first time that a blues-inflected idiom entered the mainstream of American popular culture. As Europe's biographer Reid Badger has noted, "Without that diffusion [of the blues], much of what developed as characteristic American popular song and dance, or jazz for that matter, would be inconceivable" (1995, 116).

The sensation that the Castles created with Europe's music boosted his growing fame, but the frivolity all ended when World War I broke out and Vernon left America to join the Royal Air Force. Vernon Castle's example was not lost on Europe, and the latter's greatest musical triumph was still to come when he entered the military. Encouraged by New York friends and colleagues to believe that benefits would accrue to the black community in general only if its leaders aided the growing war effort, he enlisted in the army in September 1916 with the intention of joining a machine-gun company.

Within weeks, he was assigned the task of recruiting a band. He recognized that there existed a shortage of trained black woodwind players in the United States and recommended that his commanding officer, Colonel Hayward, look toward Puerto Rico. By May of 1917 Europe, through strong recruiting efforts and assisted by other experienced bandmen such as Noble Sissle (the future partner of Eubie Blake), Eugene Mikell, and E. E. Thompson, had assembled a band of some thirty players—it would later grow to fifty—for the Fifteenth Regiment band (centered in Harlem), which performed its first New York concert in June. An enthusiastic hometown audience turned out, but it would be another six months before any black combat units were allowed to set foot in France.

Once arrived "over there," however, Europe and his band found themselves in a surprisingly congenial setting. The French showered praise on their patriotism, musicianship, and esprit de corps. Redesignated as the 369th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army, and training with the French Sixteenth Division, the old New York Fifteenth Regiment was no more, and the Hellfighters band, as it came to be called, was on its way. Morale under the sympathetic French commanders was extremely good, and the French people's reception of the music of the 369th was tumultuous.

If one compares Europe's Society Orchestra recordings and the even more exuberant Hellfighters band performances with other renditions

of popular songs at the time, it becomes clear what gave his groups the edge with listeners. Quick tempos coupled with onrushing energy immediately catch the ear. In performances by the large French group (with over four dozen players), which was constituted primarily of brass instruments, this sort of impetuosity was pleasantly shocking to its first hearers.

Even on the string-dominated Society Orchestra recordings, extra percussion (especially the drum solos of Buddy Gilmore in the “Castle House Rag” [1914, Victor]), typically called for in the final strains, heightened the volume, excitement, and rhythmic presence of Europe’s arrangements and emphasized the (written-out) syncopations. “Too Much Mustard” (1913, Victor), “Down Home Rag” (1913, Victor), and “The Dancing Deacon” (1919, Pathé Frère) all exhibit this wildly ragged and intense quality of abandon.

Other bands playing the same songs sound polite, stiff, and monotonous. Europe’s band, its members having been trained in the traditional manner, was perfectly capable of playing in the standard way. A Hellfighters recording of “How Ya Gonna Keep ’Em Down on the Farm?” (1919, Pathé Frère) with moderate tempos, correct intonation, and razor-sharp ensemble proves beyond a doubt that Europe was intentionally imparting a new verve within a big ensemble. In *Early Jazz* (1968) Gunther Schuller called the Hellfighters “the first big band.”

Europe also paid attention to the contributions of his individual band members. He did not loose all restraints in encouraging improvisation—which would have been rather impractical in any case with such a large group—but dozens of admiring firsthand reports summon metaphorical images that range from tangy pineapples to rushing waterfalls (included in Badger’s biography of Europe) to account for the completely unique sounds of his players.

### Early Pianists Onstage

Even before Europe was spreading the fame of African-American instrumental music in France, a number of talented solo pianists back in New York, often natives of other eastern cities, were also making the transition from ragtime and stomp to jazz. Charles Luckeyeth “Luckey” Roberts, James P. Johnson, and Eubie Blake, who had been a member of Europe’s Society Orchestra, were transforming popular Tin Pan Alley tunes and older rags, using their phenomenal technical abilities and new melodic and rhythmic methods. The steady left-hand oom-pahs of simpler rag pieces were deepened and made irreg-

ular with new stride bass patterns that went beyond simple broken octaves to add wider leaps and more chromatic chords in the lower register.

The combination of blues notes and rhythmic plasticity in the right hand, along with the frequent addition of elaborate arpeggios and operatic vocal figurations, pushed the younger generation of players to a realm which Scott Joplin (who died in 1917) would never know. With works like "Harlem Strut" and "Carolina Shout," Johnson not only created the model cutting-contest pieces of the day but began the tradition of popular pianists who thought in grander terms, who knew not only their fellow ragtimers' styles but the recordings of great classical players, artists such as Josef Hofmann and Vladimir de Pachmann.

Fats Waller, Art Tatum, Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington are only the most famous performers who quickly absorbed the developments of the late 1910s. Other easterners involved in Johnson's Harlem circle included Willie "the Lion" Smith, Joe Turner, Cliff Jackson, and many lesser lights identified only by names or nicknames in a handful of sources: Carl Edwards, Alberta Simmons, Lippy Boyette, Willie Gant, Jack "the Bear" Wilson, "the Beetle," Willie Sewall, Willie Joseph, Corky Williams, Fred Tunstall, Bobby Lee, the sisters Gertie and Susie Monk, Dick Huff, Harold Gardner, Bob Hawkins, Russell Brooks, and Edgar Dowell.

The teenage players before the war learned from the older generation and picked up lessons from listening and imitating what went on in the saloons, dance halls, summer cafés, rent parties, and theaters. These slightly senior players, such as Luckey Roberts, Eubie Blake, and especially the legendary Abba Labba (Richard McLean), exemplified their own ear-learned neighborhood traditions and tended not to mimic the midwestern style of ragtime practiced by Scott Joplin and James Scott.

The East Coast style was special. In *Music on My Mind* (1964) Willie the Lion insisted that he heard boogie-woogie from an Atlantic City player before he'd heard the Chicago version of it from Pine Top Smith. In *Jazz From the Beginning* (1988) Garvin Bushnell reported that Abba Labba "never took a steady job, . . . would come in and play for thirty minutes, cut everybody, and go out," flaunting both his skill and his independence. Abba Labba's technique reportedly was formidable (and included striding basses and melodic lines filled with chromatic experimentation), but not as elegant as James P. Johnson's.

In 1913–14 Johnson himself perfected his virtuosity in Harlem rent parties and the tough bars of the Jungles, the black club district formerly located between 60th and 63rd streets west of Ninth Avenue. In these working-class nightspots, many laborers newly arrived from the South habitually danced their leisure hours away to the accompaniment of solo piano players or pianists along with banjo, harmonica, or drum set. In such an environment, to take a strong, rhythmically clear and articulated approach was the only way for a pianist to be heard. Solid bass notes and high chords made a more resonant impression than notes clustered in the center of the keyboard, and that is exactly what Johnson's published music contains.

Of course endurance was prized, and treating a straightforward chord progression to an extended series of variations, in stomp fashion, was bound to catch the attention of the dancing listeners. By playing tremolos, cross-rhythms, and rolled chords (instead of the expected oom-pahs), with harmonic variety and persistent melodic inventiveness, the Harlem stride players became legends. Willie "the Lion" Smith's autobiography recounts in detail the numerous Newark and New York clubs that he and others worked in and depicts the trials and rewards of the business.

Luckey Roberts's and Eubie Blake's involvement in the New York theater scene once again reminds us of the Big Apple's historical enthusiasm for things associated with the stage. More than a negligible amount of Blake's subsequent influence and cachet came from his status as a composer and his acquaintance with Victor Herbert and Jerome Kern. His enduring fame came from his cocreation of the most important African-American musical comedy of the 1920s, *Shuffle Along* (1921).

The show gave ample opportunity for Blake to display his expert pianism; years later, when this early success had been almost forgotten, Blake enjoyed a revival in his personal popularity before he died at the age of 100 in 1983. His strength came also from his versatility as a composer; his written works ranged from early post-coon song rags to romantic ballads (such as "Love Will Find a Way"), novelty songs, dances ("That Charleston Dance"), and even political songs ("We Are Americans Too," "I'm Just Wild About Harry"), as well as jazz-named numbers ("Jazztime Baby").

Luckey Roberts contributed to a string of Harlem musical comedies beginning as early as 1912, when he had a small role in the early Darktown Follies hit *My Friend From Dixie*. He served as chief composer and musical director for three full musical shows before

1920: the musical comedies *My People* (1917) and *Baby Blues* (1919) and a revue called *This and That* (1919–20). A powerfully strong man with huge hands, Roberts was a commanding figure whose reach easily spanned tenths and even twelfths, enabling him to execute the most breathtaking strides on the keyboard. He continued to perform, work with other musicians, and compose for decades. He ultimately wrote more than a dozen musical comedies, published many rags that were popular with dance orchestras, became a prominent bandleader, and performed in Carnegie Hall in 1939.

The memoirs of Willie “the Lion” Smith, Eubie Blake, and James P. Johnson all confirm that a constellation of factors led to their success and the influence that they exerted on other pianists into the 1920s (James Reese Europe had died in 1919): their ability to read notes, to play in all keys, to spin out melodic improvisations with endless and flashy facility, and to hold their own socially in the rough-and-tumble world of New York nightlife. They listened to and absorbed the styles of other players. The frequency of their traveling to nearby towns also suggests that the best players were always learning and assimilating new skills while at the same time developing individual stamps or “signature chords,” a highly desirable achievement for musicians who wanted steady employment.

The limits that these players placed on their own types of improvisation and their relative independence from many New Orleans– and Chicago-style ensembles has led to a never-ending discussion of the authenticity of their personal brands of jazz. But there can be no doubt that the technical flexibility, virtuosity, skill at transforming standard popular tunes, and showmanship that all exhibited redoubled their impact in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Their activities and commitment to the city of New York confirm that Broadway, Harlem, and their environs could lay claim to creating a dynamic part of jazz’s early legacy.

## The Blues in Jazz

*Bob Porter*



**T**he blues is the music of black Americans. Originating in the South and first discovered in Mississippi, it is music that developed from field hollers, work songs, religious music, and folk melodies. Undergoing continuous change through the years, it has kept its characteristics throughout. The blues means different things to different people. Simultaneously a form and a feeling, it has provided inspiration for singers and musicians for over a century. Blues influence can be heard in each form of American popular music.

There is no trace of the blues before 1890. Many suggest that “Joe Turner Blues” may be the first blues to have found some recognition with a wide audience. This blues was originally named for Joe Turney, a man responsible for moving black prisoners from Memphis to the penitentiary in Nashville and brother to Pete Turney, former governor of Tennessee. Joe Turney was famous for his method of handcuffing eighty prisoners to forty links of chain. While the lyric of “Joe Turner” referred specifically to the area around Tennessee, the melody was known all over the South. Each locale had its own lyric. By the end of the first decade of this century, the term *the blues* was in general circulation among southern blacks.

The man who more than any other was responsible for the early popularization of the blues was William Christopher Handy. Handy was born in Florence, Alabama, in 1873 and became a professional musician just out of his teens. He worked the minstrel show circuit, slowly achieving a position of respect as a cornet soloist and bandmaster. In 1903 Handy was offered a position in Michigan to conduct a municipal band comprised of white musicians. It was a position of prestige with the prospect of greater opportunity and more money than anything Handy had previously had. Yet Handy turned it down in order to direct a black Knights of Pythias band in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Handy, in his autobiography, *Father of the Blues* (1941), could offer no logical reason for his decision. Seldom did such a decision have more important consequences in black music history.

Before the year was over, Handy knew the small towns of the Mississippi delta intimately. The fertile farmland of the delta stretched from Memphis south to Vicksburg, adjoining the river and at some points stretching many miles inland. His work required that the band be able to perform for all types of social functions. Handy had a remarkable memory for music. Snatches of melody, bits of rhythm, and folk tunes that he heard throughout his travels were the inspiration for many of his blues. Those songs, in turn, provided the foundation for a budding career as a songwriter. "Memphis Blues" was the first. Published in 1912, it was well known as a political song Handy wrote for E. H. Crump in his successful mayoral campaign of 1909. "St. Louis Blues," "Yellow Dog Blues," "Joe Turner Blues," "Beale Street Blues," "Aunt Hagar's Children," "Loveless Love," "Ole Miss," "Atlanta Blues," and more followed in quick succession.

The blues that Handy developed was twelve bars with the lyric and melody in AAB form, yet the lyric rarely utilized the full four bars. The space at the end of each line left room for fills, which allowed commentary on what had just been said or provided a setup for the next line. The fills could be vocal or instrumental. While there are many variations, chiefly eight- or sixteen-bar compositions, the space for fills is a constant.

What are known as blue notes are the flatted third, seventh, and (in later years) fifth notes in the scale. The twelve-measure blues chorus is, in its most basic form, based on only three chords: I7, IV7, and V, though there are seemingly unlimited permutations—many of them quite sophisticated. How a singer or instrumentalist deals with this harmonic pattern, the blue notes, and the fills between phrases determines his or her effectiveness as a blues performer.



Ma Rainey and her Georgia Jazz Band, 1925. Courtesy of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.

By 1918, W. C. Handy had moved his base of operations to New York, where he became a prominent music publisher. As much as Handy should be recognized as the man who codified the blues and shaped the music for its move into the popular mainstream, it should also be noted that his method of performing was not to last. Downriver, in New Orleans, musicians had been dealing with the blues for some time. There are no recordings of Buddy Bolden. His band had broken up by the middle of the century's first decade. Yet it seems likely that when Bolden and his band played "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor," "Careless Love," or "Funky Butt," blue notes, the distinctive characteristic of the blues, were a part of the performance.

Handy was most interested in sheet music sales, but the growing audience for phonograph records provided a second outlet for royalty income. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded "Livery Stable Blues" (Victor) in 1917, and its release created a sensation. The band was a white band from New Orleans, and of the fifty-four titles released by the band during its earliest existence, more than 30 percent had *blues* as a part of the title. It was common at this time for songs without any structural connection to the blues to use the term in a title. The group recorded some of Handy's songs. Much the same could be said of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, a Chicago-based white group, who came to prominence a bit later. While the white bands of the time learned much from listening to black music, they also had their own traditions. Still, the blues played a major part in their repertoire. If white jazz players, in general, relied less on blue notes for the substance of their solos, that didn't mean that players such as pianist Joe Sullivan or trombonist Jack Teagarden could not be impressive blues soloists, even specialists. The same is true for white jazz players in all styles.

With the recorded appearance of the great black bands of New Orleans, we get a different picture, and the contrast becomes apparent. King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (1923 for Gennett, OKeh, and Paramount), Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Seven (1925–28 for OKeh), and Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers (1926–30 for Victor) were not only loaded with new ideas on the blues, but the soloists themselves were, to a man, outstanding interpreters of the blues. The key performers had to leave New Orleans in order to be heard since the Crescent City had no recording industry as such. Chicago was the initial destination, but eventually Oliver, Armstrong, and Morton all came to New York. Sidney Bechet, another New Orleanian, would not emerge as a leader on records until early 1932, yet his fame and

virtuosity were well established in New York circles in the 1920s. It was one thing to use blues in repertoire; it was another thing to be a convincing blues soloist. Armstrong's 1928 version of "West End Blues" is an outstanding example of a great blues solo by a great jazz musician.

If the arrival of the great New Orleans musicians helped expose blues improvisation to an audience clearly thirsting for it, so did the advent of black vocal blues. Mamie Smith recorded "Crazy Blues" on August 10, 1920, for Okeh records, and still another milestone was reached. A huge best-seller, it launched countless other vocal blues recordings in its wake, and before long there was Clara Smith, Trixie Smith, and the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith. Sippie Wallace, Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox, and Victoria Spivey were among others in this field dominated by female singers, often referred to as vaudeville blues. The designation appears obscure today, but it is important to remember that these performers were professionals, with accompanists, managers, and all the incumbent trappings of show business.

Of the many prominent women in the blues field, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey stands out. She had performed in minstrel shows as a teenager in the early years of the century. There is some evidence that she heard and absorbed a primitive form of blues as early as 1905. By 1914 she and her husband were billed as "Rainey and Rainey, Assassins of the Blues" in an act they performed for Tolliver's Circus and Musical Extravaganza. By all accounts she was an influence on most of the black singers of the era and was renowned for her ability to work an audience. Her recording career from 1923 to 1928 produced about one hundred songs. Ma Rainey introduced the blues standard "See See Rider" in her 1924 Paramount recording. Her attitude toward the music, toward her presentation, and especially toward men would continue to be passed down to future performers long after her retirement.

The kinship of blues and jazz was never stronger than in the 1920s. The rural black music that had inspired Handy had yet to fully emerge. By the end of the decade, it would arrive in the recordings of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, Mississippi John Hurt, and Son House, among others. Called folk blues or country blues, it would distinguish itself from the vaudeville blues and create its own stream. This music would provide the basis of the modern blues business, which arrived with electric blues in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sparked by the great Texas guitar stylist T-Bone Walker, Muddy Waters, the father of modern Chicago blues, and the stand-alone brilliance of B. B. King.

With the success of "Crazy Blues," recordings became more important than sheet music sales. Hundreds of blues recordings were made in the 1920s, most of them in New York. Blues accompaniment has always been of interest to jazz fans. Clarinetists or saxophonists could slur or bend notes in a way that would enhance the blues line being sung. Brass players found ingenious uses for mutes, hats, or plungers. How the accompanist used the space allotted was often a key element. The placement of individual notes could provide a different feeling to a performance. A singing clarinet, moaning saxophone, or growling trumpet could emphasize or respond to a portion of the song in unique ways.

Pianists such as James P. Johnson and Sam Price were in great demand for recording sessions with blues singers. For an orchestra leader such as Fletcher Henderson, blues sessions became an important source of income. Henderson, who appears on hundreds of blues records, would utilize his own key soloists such as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, or Buster Bailey on record dates. Henderson band members such as trumpeter Joe Smith and trombonist Charlie Green became known for their blues ability.

Another road to success for black bandleaders in the 1920s was the new medium of radio. When Duke Ellington began at the Cotton Club in Harlem in late 1927, he became a hero to his people not because they could gain entry to the whites-only establishment but because they could hear him on the radio. Because of the steady job, Ellington was able to keep some remarkable players: alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, trumpeter Cootie Williams, and trombonist Tricky Sam Nanton among them. While Ellington preferred to wrap his orchestra in elegance and sophistication, at its heart, his was a great blues band. More than any other bandleader, he (and his soloists) had absorbed the language of the great New Orleans originators.

Ellington had begun recording in 1924 and Henderson even earlier. Radio and records were the twin methods of gaining publicity in the 1920s. By the end of the decade, each bandleader was well known in the black community of most major cities. In the Southwest, in Texas, Oklahoma, and nearby locales, the music was being shaped and molded in other hands. One could find the fine band of Ernie Fields in Tulsa, while in Houston the legendary band of Milton Larkin was a popular unit. Pianist-arranger Jesse Stone had a band headquartered in St. Joseph, Missouri. There were others in San Antonio, Dallas, and Omaha, but there were more of them in Kansas City than anywhere else.

Kansas City was a hub of big band activity. One of the reasons

was that the mob had a solid operation there. Organized crime in America was fueled by the passage of the Volstead Act, which created Prohibition. Tom Pendergast ran the municipal government with the backing of local mobsters. The town was wide open for gambling, narcotics, and prostitution. There was so much money around that the Depression was scarcely felt in Kansas City. Under those circumstances it is not surprising that entertainers of all shapes and sizes flocked there.

Two bands stood above all others in Kansas City: the Blue Devils and the Bennie Moten Orchestra. The Blue Devils, under the leadership of bassist Walter Page, lasted from 1925 until 1933, while Moten, a stronger and more popular force, was a part of the scene from the early 1920s until his death in 1935. At that point, the best players from each organization came together under the leadership of a pianist who had played with both bands—William “Count” Basie.

Basie put together a group known as the Barons of Rhythm, which broadcast from its home base, the Reno Club. Among the members of the band were trumpeter Hot Lips Page and his replacement, Buck Clayton; tenor saxophonists Lester Young and Herschel Evans; alto saxophonist Buster Smith; guitarist and violinist Claude Williams; drummer Jo Jones; and singer Jimmy Rushing. This is a Hall of Fame lineup, and while there are no recordings of the Barons of Rhythm, we have plenty of recordings by Count Basie and His Orchestra beginning in 1937.

The Count Basie Orchestra recorded a song called “Swingin’ the Blues” for Decca Records in 1938, and that title defines the Basie *modus operandi*. It was not an arranger’s band like Fletcher Henderson’s or one that emphasized the compositions of its leader such as Ellington’s. The Basie band was built from the rhythm section and turned the spotlight on soloists. As such, the star soloists played a much greater role, especially the tenor saxophonists. Writer Albert Murray has dubbed this first Basie band the Old Testament band.

Of the key Basie performers, vocalist Jimmy Rushing stands out. Known as Mister Five by Five because of his height and girth, Rushing was equally at home with blues and pop songs. Several of his blues vocals became Basie standards: “Good Morning Blues” and “Sent for You Yesterday” on Decca as well as “Goin’ To Chicago” and “Outskirts of Town” for OKeh-Columbia. An original member of the Count Basie band, Rushing stayed until 1949.

Apart from Rushing, there were major changes in the Basie band

fairly quickly. Key substitutions on alto sax (Earle Warren), guitar (Freddie Greene), and trombone (Dicky Wells) made for a vast improvement in the strength of the orchestra. While the acceptance of the band by dancers and fans was immediate, those tenor sax chairs kept changing.

Evans and Young were distinctive stylists, and the contrast between them was important. Evans died in 1939, and his replacement was Buddy Tate. When Young left in 1940, a succession of players came and went—Don Byas, Lucky Thompson, Young again in 1944, and Illinois Jacquet. When Jacquet left in 1946, the transformation toward the New Testament band of the 1950s would begin.

Basie had to drop the big band for 1950 and much of 1951. When he re-formed, some major changes were undertaken. Band members such as Ernie Wilkins, Frank Foster, Thad Jones, and others were writing for a now formidable ensemble. Outside arrangers such as Neal Hefti and Quincy Jones were also important contributors to the repertoire. When singer Joe Williams and drummer Sonny Payne came aboard in 1955, the band soared. Basie kept his rhythm sound intact, and that was its distinguishing characteristic until the end. Long after the last vestiges of the Old Testament band had disappeared, the lessons of Kansas City were still being observed. Swing the blues.

After the departure from Kansas City of the Count Basie band, the focus turned to those who remained. Singer Joe Turner and pianist Pete Johnson were a formidable team at the Sunset Café. Turner was the archetypical blues shouter whose career lasted from the 1930s into the 1980s and was one of the few who made the transition to rhythm-and-blues, even rock-and-roll. A tall, heavy-set individual, Turner had a voice that displayed little subtlety and left even less to the imagination. Although he was functionally illiterate, Turner was capable of rocking the house and shouting the walls down. “Roll ‘Em Pete” (1938, Vocalion) and “Piney Brown Blues” (1940, Decca) were among his best early recordings. Pete Johnson, who plays on both the Turner recordings, was one of the finest blues pianists in history. Promoter John Hammond brought him and Turner to New York. Within a short period of time they were involved in the boogie-woogie craze.

Boogie-woogie emerged as a blues piano style in Chicago. It first appeared on record, played by Pine Top Smith, in 1929 on Vocalion. In the hands of Johnson, Meade Lux Lewis, and particularly Albert Ammons, it enjoyed a huge burst of popularity in the late 1930s and

1940s. In boogie-woogie, jazz and blues elements came into close proximity again. As the fad faded, the music began to be more accepted in blues, where it proved easily adaptable to guitar and harmonica stylists. While boogie-woogie is rarely heard in jazz today, every blues band in America performs the style.

Despite the fact that many important musicians as well as entire orchestras had departed Kansas City by 1939, there was still enough talent to form one final ensemble of importance—the Jay McShann band. The band was built around McShann's own piano playing, the blues shouting of Walter Brown, and the alto sax of Charlie Parker. Like Andy Kirk and Count Basie before him, McShann was signed by Decca Records. Decca was a relative newcomer in the recording industry, having been formed in 1934 by Jack Kapp. Yet Decca was more active in recording the great black music of its day than either Columbia or the industry leader, Victor. Sometime after his big band recording dates of 1941 and 1942 for Decca, McShann expressed regrets that some of his more advanced arrangements had been shunted aside in favor of the blues. Yet the blues that the McShann group turned out were not only big sellers but also superb examples of Kansas City jazz. Among the best of those recordings were "Hootie Blues" from 1941 and "The Jumpin' Blues" from the following year. Jay McShann stands today as an artist who is revered in both jazz and blues circles.

Before World War II and the subsequent recording ban of 1942 and 1943, there seemed to be a continuous stream of young blues-oriented jazz bands arriving on the scene. Bands led by Earl Hines, Chick Webb, Cab Calloway, and Jimmie Lunceford were splendid orchestras playing great jazz, yet they were different in character from those of Erskine Hawkins, Lucky Millinder, Lionel Hampton, and Buddy Johnson, where the blues played a greater role. In each of these bands the beat began to change from ballroom swing to something with a little more backbeat, a heavier style.

The Hawkins band began as the Alabama State Collegians and had been recorded since 1936. Hit recordings came after the band switched to Victor, and songs such as "After Hours" and "Tuxedo Junction" were enormously popular with black audiences.

Lucky Millinder had been a front man for the Mills Blue Rhythm Band since 1933, but in 1941 his own band began to record for Decca. Several outstanding vocalists developed by Millinder included Annisette Allen, Wynonie Harris, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Lionel Hampton, one of the most famous black musicians in the

country, was known for his association with Benny Goodman. Hampton, a recording leader for Victor since 1937, had recorded dozens of small-group titles with the very best jazz players of the time, but it was only when he switched to Decca in 1941 that his big band, formed in 1940, began to be heard. He managed to get two sessions cut before the August 1, 1942, start of the American Federation of Musicians recording ban. The honking, screaming tenor sax solo style that emerged from the Hampton band in players such as Illinois Jacquet and Arnett Cobb became an important part of all his subsequent bands. To get a harder, heavier rhythm feel, Hampton demanded that his drummer play with the butt end of the sticks. When auditioning a replacement for a departing soloist, Hampton would often decide to hire the man based on how well he played the blues.

Prior to the 1942 recording ban Buddy Johnson had been the pianist and leader of a smaller combo, yet his first big band, formed in 1944, was an instant success. Johnson's bluesy songs, the vocals of his sister Ella, and a hard-rocking ensemble were the principal ingredients of his Decca records.

These bands found virtually all of their following in the black community. Most of the white audience in what was still a segregated America had different tastes. A white band such as Woody Herman's (at one time billed as "The Band That Plays the Blues") had fans in the black community, yet Herman rarely performed for black people. The white press covered black bands in theaters or ballrooms, but mediocre white bands got more press than many of the bands mentioned above. In *The Big Bands* (4th ed. 1981), although there is a significant segment on Lionel Hampton, there is less than a column on Erskine Hawkins, one paragraph on Lucky Millinder, and no mention at all of Buddy Johnson.

While the big ballrooms of the East and Midwest were the touring venues for big bands, popular black groups in California tended not to travel so far nor appear in rooms as large. There were plenty of ballrooms in Los Angeles, yet it was music from smaller clubs that began to garner most of the attention.

Nat King Cole's trio vied with T-Bone Walker as the most popular group in the region, but there were others such as Roy Milton's Solid Senders and groups led by Joe Liggins and Johnny Otis. When Decca settled with the musicians' union in September 1943 and resumed recording, other labels were free to operate under the same terms. Columbia and Victor chose to hold out another fourteen months, but California experienced a sudden burst of small-label activity. Modern,

Aladdin, Black & White, Imperial, Specialty, Exclusive, Supreme, Jewell, Atomic, and Sunset were just some of them.

While many of these labels attempted to record a variety of music ranging from country to classical, the bedrock of their business was small-combo jazz and blues. Nat Cole's trio on Capitol begot Johnny Moore's Three Blazers (with Charles Brown)—first on Modern then Aladdin—which led to Ray Charles's Maxim trio on Swingtime, all with the same piano, guitar, and bass instrumentation. PeeWee Crayton followed T-Bone Walker (Capitol) on Modern, with Crayton clearly patterned on Walker. Combos such as Milton, Walker, and Amos Milburn featured mellow saxophone by Buddy Floyd, Bumps Myers, or Maxwell Davis. When Illinois Jacquet burst onto record with his more aggressive saxophone style (simultaneously on Apollo and Aladdin), he created a stir that would manifest itself in the playing of Big Jay McNeely and others. But it would take some time.

The problem here was marketing the music. All black music had been considered race music until Jerry Wexler coined the term *rhythm-and-blues* in 1949. The success of small combos on the West Coast was duplicated in the East and Midwest. Labels such as Mercury in Chicago and King in Cincinnati joined East Coast powerhouses Savoy, Atlantic, and Jubilee. None of these labels was in existence before World War II, yet each became a significant force in black music. Decca held sway among the big labels and maintained a solid roster of best-selling black artists. Columbia was nowhere in sight. After 1950, any R&B hits by the major labels would be a rare occurrence.

Decca artist Louis Jordan, the single most popular black artist of the entire decade, dominated the 1940s. His little jump band launched a thousand similar groups, and his brand of jump blues bridged the gap between swing and R&B. Once again we have an era where jazz and blues coincide. The popular combo leaders such as Jordan, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Bullmoose Jackson, and Nat King Cole were musicians. They were also adults.

The early 1950s were the great years of R&B. As the decade progressed, the vocalists became increasingly younger and attempts to spread R&B to a white audience meant that arrangers became more necessary to the recording process. Every big American city had at least one radio station where R&B was a part of the programming. If a record label could package young vocal talent with the right song in a catchy arrangement, concentrated airplay could create a hit record.