The Story of Boogie-Woogie

A Left Hand Like God

Peter J. Silvester

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This present edition is dedicated to the memory of

Pete Johnson (1904),
Meade Lux Lewis (1905),
and
Albert Ammons (1907)

—members of the Boogie-Woogie Trio,
the centennial of whose births fell in the period 2004 to 2007.

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Preface

I began writing this book in 1980 because I felt that the story of boogie-woogie, and the myriad piano players who practiced it, had never been satisfactorily written. In 1982, or thereabouts, I learned that Denis Harbinson, a professor of music at University College in Cardiff, was also preparing to write a book on the same subject. We corresponded and sent each other articles and reviews. Sadly, Denis died in 1983 and left behind research notes analyzing some of the recordings of various pianists, a detailed and well-documented chapter on the lumber industry, and the outline of another chapter on nomenclature and definition. I had already completed about seven chapters when I heard of his death. It seemed pointless to ignore the groundwork that Denis had completed, and so, with the encouragement of his widow, I read his notes and found that most of them could be adapted and incorporated into what I had already written. In doing so, I was conscious that his musical examples gave an enhanced credibility to the work, as well as adding to the unfolding story. The inspirational element in the title was also provided by Denis and was taken from a description by Eubie Blake of William Turk's piano playing, that he had a left hand like God (reported in R. Blesh and H. Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, published by the Jazz Book Club in arrangement with Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1960).

It would have been impossible to begin writing a book on the subject of boogie-woogie without the continuing help and support of many record collectors and pianists actively playing and recording in the boogie-woogie style. In the early stages of gathering information about the topic, invaluable help was given by three people: Dan Gunderman, a pianist and collector from Milwaukee; Richard Lindaman from Minnesota, whose intelligent and perceptive comments I came to respect and appreciate as our correspondence continued; and, from England, Bob Tomlinson, the record collector supreme, who introduced me to the work of the European pianists. All three helped to get the project under way and without their regular tapes and letters, the book would have been stillborn. They also gave moral support during those black moments when I began to doubt the wisdom of my undertaking.

I was fortunate to make contact with Tom Harris from Fort Worth, Texas, who introduced me to Ben Conroy of Austin, Texas. Both of these men were good exponents of boogie-woogie and had met pianists Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson personally. They generously shared their reminiscences with me as well as provided material and photographs from their personal collections. Through their introductions I was able to make contact with Phil Kiely and Dick Mushlitz, a founding member of the Salty Dogs Jazz Band, both of whom knew the Yanceys and made frequent visits to their apartment. Dr. John Steiner sent his taped recollections of his contacts with Albert Ammons and Jimmy Yancey. Then there were the pianists: Charles Booty, a boogie-woogie pianist and raconteur from Tennessee who shared his experiences; Bob Seeley of Detroit, a brilliant interpreter of boogie-woogie and other styles, whose long friendship with pianist Meade Lux Lewis was faithfully recalled for me; and Axel Zwingenberger, from Germany, an international artist and one of the foremost exponents of boogie-woogie today who advised me on historical and distinctive features of the genre.

Edsel Ammons, the son of Albert Ammons, gave me the essential living link with the past. Now a retired bishop in Columbus (Ohio), his wise and apposite comments enabled me to sort out the truth from the fiction surrounding famous people.

David Home, the then librarian at the University of Exeter, responded with tolerance to my early requests for access to tape recordings, transcriptions, magazines, and books held in the excellent jazz and blues section for which he was responsible.

These were the major sources of inspiration for the initial writing. I like to think that our joint endeavors sewed the seeds of a lasting friendship.

Twenty years on, I can say that the reception given to the first edition of the book by piano players, patrons, and record collectors of boogie-woogie music has been most gratifying. Newspaper and magazine reviews have been predominantly supportive of the book, not least because it was a first attempt to document the history and evolution of the piano style.

The quest for the direction in which any new writing on the subject might take was eventually decided after discarding my initial thought of a biography of Meade Lux Lewis—Pete Johnson's own story had already been produced in the admirable *Pete Johnson Story* by Hans J. Mauerer in 1965 and Albert Ammons's life revealed in *Boogie-Woogie Stomp* written by Christopher Page in 1997; or of writing about the rising phenomenon of the European boogie-woogie pianists. Reading again some of the reviews of the book convinced me that although much valuable ground had been covered by listening to many hours of live and recorded music, collating evidence from disparate visual, oral, and written sources for the historical background and personal judgments in the book, there were still gaps. In the years since the completion of the initial study, new information had become available about the lives of pianists, their movements, recordings, and the social settings in which they lived and worked; and some had not even been included in the first writing. It became clear that what was required was a review, expansion, and reordering of the original text.

Consequently, more analysis of the boogie-woogie recordings of various pianists has been included within the book in order to align them more closely with the biographical information and to place them in a temporal context. The sources of these recordings have either been vinyl long-playing records (LPs) or compact discs (CDs) in the belief that any keen collector will want to hunt them down from secondhand sources if they no longer exist in company catalogs. This has resulted in the discarding of the limited selected discography of the first edition for a more substantial and inclusive listing of recordings.

One criticism was that the parameters of the original study were too narrowly defined by not considering the influence of boogie-woogie piano playing on rhythm and blues and other musical styles. This has now been addressed by examining the growth of rhythm and blues on the West Coast of America and New Orleans and been included in a newly written chapter. Coterminous with this study of rhythm and blues, listening to the work of pianists Maceo Merriweather, Otis Spann, and others associated with urban blues bands convinced me that their deployment of boogie-woogie was critical in helping to lay down the pulsatingly electric beat of these groups; and coincidentally, to sustain the boogie-woogie style after it had peaked in the immediate post–World War II period. A new chapter on pianists in blues bands has been added that also considers the work of other, mainly blues pianists, whose piano styles have been substantially shaped by boogie-woogie. Finally, the current interest being shown in "'classical" boogie-woogie by European pianists was deserving of detailed examination and review. Pursuing this topic led me to write of the early appearances of the genre in Britain and several other European countries. The chapter on the role of the national and independent companies in recording boogie-woogie music has been rewritten and lengthened.

With an expanded text and seeking fluidity and conciseness in the writing, many of the extracts quoted directly from other sources that were included in the first edition have been removed and their gist produced in the text of this edition. The references in the chapter endnotes are, as a result, more comprehensive and greatly improved for other researchers to use. A bibliography, significant magazine articles on boogie-woogie, and useful record liner notes have been added.

I sincerely hope that both new readers and those who have read the earlier edition will find stimulation and satisfaction from these attempts to record the fascinating story of boogie-woogie. If that is so, I rest my pen happy in the knowledge that the genre continues to thrive.

Since completing the rewriting, I have to report the sad news that pianist Charlie Booty and pianist and collector Phil Kiely have both passed away. The death of Tom Harris following a long illness occurred as this edition was in preparation.

Peter J. Silvester
May 2009

Acknowledgments

Assistance with transferring the first edition onto computer in preparation for writing this edition was provided by Dr. Edward Neather and Otter Computers of Budleigh Salterton. Renée Camus of Scarecrow Press proved to be a patient editor. My grateful thanks to all three. I have been assisted in my task by the generous and unstinting support of numerous collectors who have unconditionally allowed me access to their letters, photographs, and memorabilia.

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Census and other sources: Twelfth Census of the United States 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910; Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920; Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930 and Alabama State Assistance. Data from these concerning Clarence "Pinetop" Smith and his family were kindly provided by the Troy Public Library Service, Alabama, United States.

The information about the recordings of pianists and other musicians included in the text was obtained from or confirmed by B. Rust (compiler), *Jazz Records 1897–1942* (Chigwell, UK: Storyville Publications, 1970) and R. Dixon and J. Godrich (compilers), *Blues and Gospel Records 1902–194*3 (Chigwell, UK: Storyville Publications, 1982).

The accuracy of the chapter end notes would not have been possible without the continuing assistance of Konrad Nowakowski, whose archive provided the fine detail necessary for completing the references. The majority of references have been fully completed.

A special thanks to *Downbeat* magazine for the invaluable socio-historical and musical information provided between its covers on the period circa 1935 to 1950.

Part One

THE BEGINNINGS

1

Boogie-Woogie: Early Appearances and Names by Which It Was Known

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth, as much as evidence will allow, American blues music spawned a noisy offspring that was eventually given the name of boogie-woogie. It was, and is, a primitive and rhythmical style of piano playing that achieved its zenith during World War II, in the early 1940s. At this time it was heard incessantly on the radio, in concerts, and on film sound tracks. Solo pianists of all shades played it, from Meade Lux Lewis, an original performer in the style; through Bob Zurke, a skilled technician who learned boogie-woogie with the Bob Crosby Band; to Jose Iturbi, a classical pianist of some repute. Most of the leaders of the top swing bands commissioned novelty boogie-woogie compositions that featured their pianists. Tommy Lineham played "Chips Boogie-Woogie" with the small group of the same name drawn from the Woody Herman Band, while Mary Lou Williams did a similar job for the Andy Kirk Band on numbers such as "Little Joe from Chicago." In its most commercial form, lyrics were added to its rhythms to produce popular songs with the endearing titles of "The Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B" and "Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat," which climbed high in the hit parade when interpreted by the Andrews Sisters, the most successful close harmony vocal group of the period. By the end of the forties, however, boogie-woogie had slipped quietly out of public favor, a victim of dilution, commercial exploitation, and overexposure.

The style, which started in the southern and midwestern states of America, is attributed to untutored black piano players who emphasized the rhythmical properties of the piano instead of the more usual melodic ones in their playing. Boogie-woogie music was fashioned from the blues, which, in turn, had its roots in the chants and field hollers of work gangs as they sang to relieve the monotony of laying rail tracks, quarrying stone, or plowing the land. The southern states were the setting for the early blues because of the high proportion of newly emancipated black slaves living in that region. They took their musical heritage with them when they eventually uprooted and moved to the cities of the Midwest and northern states in search of work—a migration that began in the early years of the twentieth century. The close lineage of boogie-woogie and the blues, its reported appearance in southern states and later Kansas, St. Louis, and Chicago is not, therefore, difficult to explain.

The traditional pattern of the blues is one of twelve bars, but less common versions of eight and sixteen bars are also played. From the earliest known days, blues were sung with a guitar accompaniment that provided a rhythmical backing and fill-in phrases between the verses. This pattern continues today, with the guitar player alternating between laying down a solid ground rhythm of short repetitive phrases (ostinato) of single notes and chords in the lower registers of the instrument, and embellishing the singer's sentiments—with extemporized runs, trills, and chords—in the medium and high registers. The blues is a simple yet effective musical form that can be played at many levels ranging from the elementary chording of the amateur musician to the complex and evocative sounds produced by the musician with superior technical skills. The lyrics are often sad, sometimes humorous or aggressively assertive, and are normally concerned with human frailties associated with love, loneliness, sex, drink, and poverty. The themes sometimes take their inspiration from catastrophes and significant events in the singer's life. The great Mississippi Delta flood and the tornado that struck St. Louis during the past century have been both commemorated in blues compositions. The blues runs the whole gamut of human emotions and experience.

At one stage removed from boogie-woogie, which is essentially a solo performance, the piano accompaniment to blues singing was a direct copy of the guitar player's technique. Treble phrases on the piano replaced the fill-in passages on the guitar, and the ostinato ground rhythm of the guitar was replicated on the piano by similar figures played deep in the bass. Another left-hand pattern that was sometimes used alternated on the beat between chords in the bass and middle registers of the piano. Known as stride bass, it was initially adapted from the syncopated stylings of ragtime pianists. (*Stride* is the term reserved for the eastern-coast school of piano playing that was centered in New York and exemplified in the works of Thomas Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Luckey Roberts.) Stride basses were not popular with unschooled pianists because of the superior technique required for playing them. Most pianists could get by when called on to play a stride bass for a blues, but they were on surer ground playing a rhythmically acceptable accompaniment in which the left hand was anchored in the bass notes as in boogie-woogie.

Boogie-woogie gradually became recognized as a distinct piano form as it evolved from its secondary function as a blues accompaniment to a solo performance. The subtle embellishments supporting the singer's lyrics were discarded and replaced in the treble by short repeated phrases, runs, sharply struck chords, repeated single notes, and trills that emphasized rhythm at the expense of melody. Where the guitar player switched between playing in the bass and treble ranges of his instrument, the pianist was able to produce a continuous series of varied and contrasting tones at the same time in both registers, each hand working independently of the other—a defining attribute of boogie-woogie playing. The left hand would endlessly repeat an ostinato bass pattern, usually of eight beats to the bar in the three blues chord positions (C, F, and G in the key of C), while the right hand supported or played across the bass rhythm, and in so doing, produced complex cross rhythms. Although dating from a later period than the embryonic stages under consideration, Delta bluesman Robert Johnson shows in his guitar playing the kind of deep ostinato rhythms that early boogie-woogie pianists copied from guitarists in numbers like "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" (later recorded by pianist Eddie Boyd), "Kind Hearted Woman," and "Rambling on My Mind," all laid down in 1936 in San Antonio, Texas. A minority of boogie-woogie compositions are "blue" in tone and feeling—notably those of Jimmy Yancey and Montana Taylor—but the mood engendered by boogie-woogie playing is generally different from the blues. A solid rumbling tone is endemic to the music, giving it an exciting quality for both listener and player. The blues in its various moods evokes sadness; boogie-woogie at whatever tempi transmits a raw, buoyant energy. William (Bill) Russell considered it rhythmically less complex than some forms of African music but more rhythmically complex than the conventional style of jazz piano with the repetitive bass patterns constantly contrasting with the varying rhythms of the treble to produce galvanizing polyrhythms. Further, good boogie-woogie generates a distinctive swing not found in the imitators whose playing, although possessing an excellent tempo, sounds dull and ineffectual.[1]

Although the music is quintessentially rhythmical, a cause-and-effect link with African drumming and racial memory patterns brought to America by slaves transported from Africa is probably too simplistic for explaining the dynamic qualities of boogie-woogie. However, it is considered by some to be the purest musical example of African elements merging with a culturally mixed music: The result of its mainly rhythmical African heritage combined with ragtime, an American phenomenon, is music that, though not found in Africa, has all the qualities of music from that continent.[2]

While recognizing that boogie-woogie was partly formed by integrating these two cultural elements, it does not fully explain the rich and diverse process that must have occurred temporally rather than through some kind of "big bang." For a clearer understanding of how boogie-woogie finally emerged from chrysalis to unique piano style played by black Americans, we have to draw parallels with other, better documented changes that occurred in African-American culture and make considered hypotheses.

The eclectic nature of African-American culture, it has been suggested, is the result of the adaptation and reshaping of the music from one culture to meet the aesthetic requirements and social needs of African-Americans.[3] An example of this would be the introduction of syncopated rhythms (African inspired) into the piano playing and singing of (European) hymns in black churches and their later cross-currents with secular music. Similar processes occurred in other art forms when the stylized European dance steps of jigs and reels were modified and emerged, in the 1890s, as the more rhythmical cakewalk. By the 1920s, many of the regional songs of African-Americans residing in isolated turpentine and logging camps of Florida had begun to disappear and were being replaced by songs learned from the radio and records. Popular blues of the day were taken up enthusiastically in these and other black communities as people became more dependent on the ubiquitous phonograph for their entertainment. Interestingly, the original words and music were frequently modified to reflect local circumstances, so producing a new and vital form of the music. The process of acculturation is a two-way journey, however, with many European art forms benefiting from African-American initiatives—not least jazz music itself. Similarly, the uninhibited expressive qualities of the dances created by Katherine Dunham and her troupe, particularly active in New York in the 1940s, had a beneficial releasing impact on more stylized, European dance forms.

So, how does the foregoing relate to the birth and flowering of the boogie-woogie piano style? To begin with, it helps us to realize that it probably passed through several evolutionary phases. Change is multilayered, involving exposure to, and interaction with, many influences dating, in this case, probably from the end of the American Civil War (1861–1865) and the post-Reconstruction period (1865–1867) when black slaves were enfranchised. The first impact of this would have resulted in a greater freedom of expression and creativity, no longer dictated by the cultural constraints of the former white slave owners. However, the hereditary African heritage would have been continuously susceptible to modification by the predominantly European culture, albeit in a less deterministic way than previously. Within this framework, one of the social requirements for the mainly poor urban and rural communities, in which African-Americans lived, would be for a simple music with a powerful rhythm for entertainment and dancing. Whereas the guitar supported the subtleties and vocal expression of the blues singer, its role would have been modified when providing the stimulus and rhythm for dancing, even to the extent of employing two guitars: one laying down a deep and steady ostinato ground rhythm, while the second filled in over the rhythm with chords, runs, and other devices. Before amplification, this ensured that the music could be heard by the dancers. It would be a short step to replace two guitars with a piano, for producing the same effect. As dancing became increasingly popular and halls got bigger, a piano with its front cover removed could reach all corners of a noisy dance area. The potent mix of alcohol, release from grinding work, for a few hours at least, and both sexes looking for a good time meant that the musical demands on pianists were few. They had to be able to play fast numbers for dancers to “stomp” and slow drags for the more sexual “belly-rubs.” Early boogie-woogie pianists who provided the music for these social activities brought an untutored approach to their playing, uncluttered by the European traditions of a learned technique or “set” compositions. Their own creativity and its expression were paramount, stimulated and sustained by the sounds and rhythms of gospel church music, guitar blues, and popular music of the day usually played by ragtime pianists or from piano rolls. All went into the melting pot that finally produced the boogie-woogie piano styles of today.

Roberts and Amouroux[4] draw attention to the similarity between the repetitive xylophone rhythms produced by native Africans and boogie-woogie basses that is more of a subtle and melodic parallel than a singular cause-and-effect relationship with the rhythms of African drumming. Indeed, boogie-woogie does have certain melodic features that are frequently omitted from its analysis. Trains provided endless themes, as it was possible to represent the haunting sound of whistles, expresses romping along on a full head of steam, wheels clattering over points, and, of course, the insistent rhythm of the driving wheels. A recording by Lemuel Fowler, “Express Train Blues” (1929), which might be expected to be one of the earliest of a train boogie, turns out not to possess any of these qualities but is a droll jazz piece complete with “real” train noises. However, examples of a kind of musical onomatopoeia can be heard on many recordings of train numbers: Clarence Lofton’s “Streamline Train,” Charles Davenport’s “Cow Cow Blues,” Wesley Wallace’s “Number Twenty-Nine,” and later compositions by Meade Lux Lewis such as “Honky Tonk Train Blues,” “Six Wheel Chaser,” and “Chicago Flyer.”

Such a preoccupation with trains is seen by Alan Lomax as having important psychological benefits, raising optimism for a better life as the piano was changed by untrained African-Americans into a complex, rhythmical train that offered the prospect of a joyous independence for its listeners.[5] Whereas the guitar and piano accompaniment to blues singers provided an emotional bedrock for expressing many of the unhappy circumstances in their lives, boogie-woogie piano in its various train manifestations promised an escape to a better life further on down the line for many African-Americans.

Bugle calls were sometimes used either as choruses in the melody or as "breaks" between choruses. The best-known example is provided in Jimmy Yancey's "Yancey's Bugle Call"—a piece designed completely around a bugle call motif; other pianists who made use of them were Montana Taylor in "Lowdown Blues," Jabo Williams in "Jab's Blues," and Albert Ammons in "Reveille Boogie."

The word "*chimes*" was originally thought to be a synonym for boogie-woogie, but an examination of two numbers, "Chimes Blues" by Davenport and "Eastern Chimes Blues" by Henry Brown, suggests that this is not so. Despite the former having an occasional passage or two of walking bass, neither piece could be said to fall into a typical boogie-woogie form. In fact, the complete melodic structure of Brown's piece is built around a descending sequence of chiming chords. Chime effects were sometimes used to introduce a number, as in Ammons's "Shout for Joy" in which the softly delicate treble chimes of the introduction contrast with, and give emphasis to, the powerful bass. Ammons also employed the same effect in his recording of "Mecca Flat Blues."

In examining the evolution of boogie-woogie, we already have it on record that Chicago pianists Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis learned their early pianistic skills from a player piano (see chapter 15), and there is a strong possibility that earlier exponents of the style acquired at least some of their technique from the player piano, also known as a Pianola.[6] These instruments were popular in the early 1900s and provided the only outlet for hearing "recorded" music through the variety of tunes imprinted on piano rolls, preceding the popular shellac recordings by some years. They could be found in bars, clubs, and any places where people gathered to socialize; the precursor of the jukebox, the player piano churned out ragtime, blues, and popular songs of the day. Jelly Roll Morton recalled their impact in New Orleans in about 1902, when it seemed that every household possessed one and their sounds could be heard in the city throughout the night and day.

The self-taught boogie-woogie tyros would have absorbed the tonal properties as well as the tunes emanating from the mechanical player piano. For example, in the absence of the sustaining pedal, which could not be used with a player piano, tremolos and trills brought light and shade to a performance by extending the time that chords could be held, which is still an important feature of the boogie-woogie player's technique. Another similarity is the sharp percussive tone of both. Whereas the sudden expulsion of air in the player piano causes the hammers to strike the wires sharply, the boogie-woogie player employs a firm finger technique for obtaining a richly varied rhythmical effect in his playing.

Typical of many of the early practitioners of boogie-woogie was the unrecorded and unschooled pianist William Turk from Baltimore. Probably born around 1866, he was a massive three hundred pounds in weight and nearly six feet tall. He died in about 1911. Turk had a large girth that hampered his technique to the extent that he had difficulty playing chords for ragtime in the mid-range of the keyboard, so he often introduced a walking bass much lower down. He would then play one note in the treble accompanied by four with his left hand, which was called "sixteen" but later became known as boogie-woogie. Eubie Blake was so impressed with Turk's forceful piano style that he said Turk possessed a left hand like God.[7]

From Blake's description it is clear that the style was not then called boogie-woogie. The first use of the term is claimed to be "Pinetop's Boogie-Woogie," a composition by Clarence Pinetop Smith and recorded on the Vocalion record label on December 29, 1928. Smith used the term both as a title and, in talking on the record, to infer music and dancing. The interesting question is what gave Smith the idea of naming his piece boogie-woogie? To answer this, one has to examine his background as a vaudevillian and a tap dancer. The "boogie-woogie" was a series of dance steps and the term was in use long before Pinetop's recording. Veteran dancer Joe Price is reported as saying that Rubber Legs Williams, when working with Bibby Grant's troupe of female dancers, brought it from the South in 1919 together with other "eccentric" dances, as they were called. They were all eventually adapted and used by chorus lines in the shows.[8]

Pinetop was undoubtedly familiar with the term *boogie-woogie* as it related to certain dance steps, some of which he may have used in his own dance routines in vaudeville. Having picked up the term, he enjoyed rolling it off his tongue, if interviews with his wife are to be believed, and used it for the title of his piece because it is concerned solely with telling the "little girl in the red dress" how to perform a particular kind of dance. What better term could there be than the onomatopoeic "boogie-woogie" for both the rhythmical, driving piano tune and the equally rambunctious dance? Additional evidence to support the notion that Pinetop drew on his vaudeville background comes from his use in the piece of another phrase, "shake that thing," as a direction to the dancer. A popular dance of the time, of which he would also have been aware, was named "Shake That Thing." It seems that Pinetop took the term *boogie-woogie* from one art form (dance) and applied it more generally to another art form (music). Because of the public's unfamiliarity with the expression, the name gave the appearance of originality, thereby contributing to the success of the record.

By the following year, other performers were doing the same thing and copying Smith's successful format on record. "Pitchin' Boogie" (1929) by Will Ezell similarly employed the term both as a title and, in talking on the record, to indicate dancing. His statement that "we're going to pitch the boogie right here" is possibly indicative of the term being used to mean a party. "Head Rag Hop" (1929) by Romeo Nelson used the term, in talking on record, to indicate dancing and "feeling" ("makes me feel so boogie-woogie"). In the 1929 recording of "Hastings Street," Charlie Spand (piano) and Blind Blake (guitar) inform us, through their patter, that the term *boogie-woogie* was used to mean either dancing or music in the city of Detroit. Also of interest is the reference made in three of the recordings to a girl (one of those dancing at these recorded re-creations of the barrelhouse or house rent party scene) in a colored dress. The color varies; in Pinetop's piece she wears a red dress. Clarence Smith's wife Sarah always maintained that the reference was to a red dress that she owned and that was a favorite with her husband. Romeo Nelson wishes to inspire a girl in a black dress while Will Ezell prefers his girl in a green one. A song entitled "Fat Fanny Stomp," recorded in 1930 by a little-known pianist, Jim Clarke, used several similar phrases in what appears to be a parody of Pinetop's tune. He also refers to doing the "Sally Long," a dance step not mentioned by Pinetop. The tradition established in these early recordings of associating the term with dancing continues today, so that "to boogie" means to dance. The wholesale adoption of the term for a style of piano playing may initially have been fortuitous, but it has now become accepted through common usage over the years.

Smith recorded two takes of his composition. The original, C 2726 A, was issued on Vocalion 1245 and has since been reissued many times. A second version, C 2726 B, was also released on Vocalion, and it is likely that only a small pressing was made, for, in its original form, it is still a very rare record. Apart from some different ordering in the piano choruses, the recordings can be identified by changes in Pinetop's patter. On Take A he introduces the dance choruses with the words, "Now I want all of you all to know this is Pinetop's Boogie-Woogie," whereas on Take B he says, "Now listen here all of you—this is my Pinetop strut. I want everyone dancing like I tell you." It is thus just conceivable that if Take B had been issued as the original version we should now have a different name for the boogie-woogie piano style.

A further confusing feature is the belief, held by some collectors, that the word used by Smith on Take B is *trouble* and not *strut*.[9] The first unissued recording session coupled "Pinetop's Blues" with "Pinetop's Troubles," and it has been inferred that Take B of "Pinetop's Boogie-Woogie" is really "Pinetop's Troubles." Although the evidence allows for such a conclusion, the insertion of *troubles* in the context of his patter about a dance does not make much sense. Opinions also differ about whether the word is *troubles* or *strut* on the aural evidence from the recording. Under the circumstances described, *strut* would seem to be a more appropriate word than *trouble*, denoting a dance of a particularly aggressive kind with sexual connotations, as in "strut that thing." Could it be perhaps that "Pinetop's Troubles" was an alternative take of "Pinetop's Blues"—the word suggests a blues—or a completely different blues composition that was never released?

The early boogie-woogie pianists entertained workers in the lumber, turpentine, and railroad industries situated in the southern states. Their stage was the barrelhouse, a crude building given its name from the liquor barrels supporting planks from which the rough liquor was served, with floor space for dancing, to the piano, and gambling. There is no doubt that in many instances, the barrelhouse also acted as a brothel. In less remote communities, boogie-woogie could be heard being played in roadside bars known as juke joints. When the piano players later moved to Chicago and other large conurbations in the 1920s, they provided the entertainment at house parties. As entertainers, pianists were required to give rudimentary directions to dancers as they played. As we have seen, there are several examples of piano solos on record illustrating a pattern of spoken directions that sometimes acted as "breaks" between choruses, as in "hold yourself." Breaks had two effects: They prepared the dancers for the next phase of the dance and they recharged the music by suspending the rhythm for a short time. It is in the latter capacity rather than the former that the break has been assimilated into contemporary boogie-woogie playing and has become one of its defining attributes.

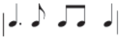
The close interaction between pianists and their audiences was an essential ingredient in the growth of the boogie style and it accounted for much of the spontaneity and creativity. The dancer and the pianist each depended on the reactions and responses of the other for stimulation. Indeed, the removal of boogie from its sustaining environment may account, in part, for its gradual disappearance as a flourishing and developing art form; numbers that were first tried out and retried at rent parties in the twenties are still played today—evidence to some extent of an ossified art form. The social milieu of the house party, evoked by Romeo Nelson in "Head Rag Hop," appears to have largely disappeared by the early 1940s, coincidentally with the entrance of the United States into World

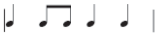
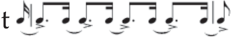
War II and the inevitable social and economic changes occurring at that time. In his strangely high-pitched voice, Nelson gives directions to the ghosts of many dancers who shuffled and gyrated together in dimly lit, smoke-filled tenement flats. Years later, Nelson said that he shaped and constructed his musical ideas at rent parties, explaining that as everyone was so drunk no one noticed if the keys were struck with fist or elbow. He would often create a new piece by improvising and working on phrases to produce a finished form while entertaining at rent parties.

The identification of 1928 as the year in which the term *boogie-woogie* was first adopted as the generic title for the piano style leads one to ponder on earlier names that it bore and of reports of its appearance in regions and cities in the United States before 1928. The boogie-woogie style was called "Dudlow Joe" in Mississippi, as reported by bass player Willie Dixon. A number actually recorded in 1929 by pianist Lee Green and given the title of "Dudlow Joe" bears a close resemblance to a piece recorded later by Little Brother Montgomery entitled "Farish Street Jive." Both pianists were active in the South during the 1920s and 1930s and their paths crossed frequently, accounting for the similarity of some of the material in their respective repertoires. Dixon described Montgomery's composition "Farish Street Jive" as a thing of beauty that in an earlier era had gone by the generic name of Dudlow.[10]

The form, structure, and repetition of musical material of "Farish Street Jive" (1936) may be shown as follows:

Chorus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
	A	B	B	C	D	E	B	C^1	B	C	B	C	(beginning only)

Comparing this with "Dudlow Joe," it is noticeable that the B material of "Farish Street Jive" (choruses 2, 3, 7, 9, and 11) corresponds with choruses 5 and 14 and to a lesser extent with choruses 8 and 12 (and possibly chorus 9 also) of "Dudlow Joe." The C material of "Farish Street Jive" (choruses 4, 8, 10, and the beginning of 12) corresponds only with chorus 7 of "Dudlow Joe." A marked similarity between the two pieces is the single-note walking bass in crotchets (i.e., four-to-the-bar) used for part of some choruses. On the other hand, while "Farish Street Jive" has twelve choruses, "Dudlow Joe" has fifteen (perhaps, an introduction followed by fourteen choruses would be a more accurate description, but for the purpose of the above comparative analysis it has not been used as such but has been designated chorus 1). Other differences are that "Dudlow Joe" uses ten-bar choruses as well as twelve-bar choruses, plus an occasional irregularity here and there; and that the ubiquitous bass figure  employed in "Dudlow Joe" never appears in "Farish Street Jive." Strangely, this bass figure—which appears in very nearly every chorus of "Dudlow Joe" (and continually throughout the whole of some choruses)—although employed as an ostinato, seems somehow to lack the urgent character of a typical boogie-woogie bass. However, the use of such boogie characteristics as walking basses (eight-to-the-bar as well as four-to-the-bar) and other ostinato bass figures may be used as evidence to point to an embryonic boogie-woogie style—and to explain the reason for the first part of Willie Dixon's statement. Regarding the second part of his statement, the similarities and differences between "Dudlow Joe" and "Farish Street Jive," as we have just seen, are such that one can assume that—though they are definitely not one and the same composition—one could be a varied version of the other, or both pieces could originally derive from the same source.

Some pieces are of a boogie-woogie character but use only a four-to-the-bar crotchet accompaniment in the left hand. A fast-tempo piece by Turner Parrish entitled "Trenches" (1933) features a few bars of  in the left-hand accompaniment. "Pitchin' Boogie" (1929; piano/talking accompanied by clarinet, guitar, and tambourine) by Will Ezell uses a stomping four-to-the-bar bass, as does another recording of his "Just Can't Stay Here" (bass example 9). Other pianists who made use of this rhythm are Meade Lux Lewis in "Bear Cat Crawl" (bass example 5) and Henry Brown in "Henry Brown Blues" (1930)—but this piece also features an eight-to-the-bar walking bass for two full choruses. A further variation introduced into the bass was an eight-to-the-bar bass with an anacrusis (upbeat) beginning but which emphasized a four-to-the-bar (crotchet) rhythm. The Henry Brown piece "Deep Morgan Blues" (bass example 17) is perhaps the best example of this type of bass where it is most noticeable (and consistently) used at the beginning of the piece and for the penultimate chorus. This same type of bass also makes a brief appearance in the latter half of "Fanny Lee Blues." Although this bass has eight notes to the bar, its anacrusis beginning stressing the (four)-crotchet beat  etc., and above all its nonmoving, static melodic design, results in its possessing a peculiarly non-boogie-woogie character.

The first half of Hersal Thomas's "Suitcase Blues" (bass example 15—the second half is completely non-boogie-woogie in all respects) uses a similar type of bass as regards the rhythmical accentuation and anacrusis beginning, but as it now possesses a certain amount of melodic movement, it assumes something more of a boogie-woogie character. Occasional use (a single bar and two bars consecutively in the course of a chorus) is made of this type of bass in Hersal Thomas's "Hersal Blues"—but only in some of its choruses; and apart from this, the piece mainly uses a vamping type of ragtime bass that, of course, contributes to anything but a boogie-woogie character.

Albert Ammons, in his version of Hersal Thomas's "Suitcase Blues," not surprisingly uses the same type of bass—though not the variants of Hersal's original (Albert uses only the version with eight notes to the bar). This same type of bass, namely eight-to-the-bar, with an anacrusis beginning stressing the four-crotchet beat, is again featured by Albert Ammons in a recording made in Chicago on October 17, 1939, and reissued on the Storyville LP 670183 under the title of "Monday Struggle." It is a different piece from the "Monday Struggle" recorded for Solo Art.

It is to Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton that we turn for a more detailed picture of the playing of boogie-woogie in the sporting houses and honky-tonks of the Storyville District of New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century, when he was active there. In his Library of Congress interviews, Morton reported to have heard Benny French playing boogie-woogie in Storyville in 1906. However, the main reason for involving him in the search for early examples of the style is found in the statement made by Ernest Borneman that Morton reconstructed Buddy Bertrand's "Crazy Chord Rag" during the making of his Library of Congress recordings for Alan Lomax.[11] In Borneman's estimation, it is an early example of recorded boogie-woogie. To start with, the piece referred to is not Morton's "Crazy Chords," which turns out to be a commercial and not a Library of Congress recording made in 1930. It is an instrumental jazz number that has nothing to do with boogie-woogie, Buddy Bertrand, or the "Crazy Chord Rag." What Borneman is referring to is the recording made for the Circle record label by Rudi Blesh from Morton's original Library of Congress recordings and issued as Album VII: *Everyone Had His Own Style*, JM-50: *Albert Carroll and Buddy Bertrand—The Crazy Chord*.[12]

Morton made all his Library of Congress recordings during the late spring and summer months and a final one in December 1938, but, of course, most of the music he is recreating belongs to a much earlier period—to the turn of the twentieth century. One such piece is AFS 1699A, the "Dirty Dozens," a piece warranting investigation on account of the boogie number utilizing the same title that was first recorded by Rufus "Speckled Red" Perryman in 1929 and subsequently on a number of other occasions. Morton confirms the title as the "Dirty Dozen" at the commencement of recording AFS 1669, adding that he initially heard the tune in Chicago. It is generally accepted that the "Dirty Dozen" is an insult song, and Morton's version certainly fulfils these requirements with a sexual reference in the first verse and a concluding refrain that the mother of the person being insulted wore no "drawers." After other obscene references throughout the piece, there is a recurrence of this latter refrain about the mother's underwear. There is a similarity between Morton's repeated refrain and the one found in Speckled Red's version of the number. Apart from this similarity of form, however, Morton's version is in no way related to the pieces by Speckled Red—neither textually nor musically—and it is definitely not boogie-woogie; but it does serve to demonstrate what the real text actually sung by Speckled Red, when performing in the barrelhouse or juke joint, was really like—for beyond doubt, it was certainly something cruder and more obscene than the expurgated texts of his commercial recordings of the "Dirty Dozens." Morton's Library of Congress recordings AFS 1656 A and B and AFS 1687 A and B entitled, in both cases, "The Winding Boy"—alternative titling as "(The) Winin Boy (Blues)" on the commercial issues—contain a reference to the legendary folk hero Stavin Chain. Whether this is a reference to an early boogie-woogie pianist by this name whom Richard Jones encountered (see chapter 2) remains in doubt.

Morton, it seems, was not greatly attracted to the boogie-woogie style of music. He once made an impromptu guest appearance in New York in 1939 at a place featuring boogie-woogie artists, probably Cafe Society, and favored the customers with a couple of numbers. He told Lomax of his visit and said his music had been well received. When Lomax inquired if he had matched the efforts of the boogie-woogie pianists, Morton responded by saying that he fully expected to hold his own against pianists who only had one tune in their repertoires.[13] Morton's playing of boogie-woogie for Alan Lomax needs to be set within the context of the times. In 1938 boogie-woogie was undergoing an unprecedented surge of popularity with followers of jazz and swing music. Under these circumstances, it would be apposite for Lomax to ask about boogie-woogie for the archives and for Morton to try to oblige by recreating some of the music he had heard but without himself holding much feeling for it or commitment to it. After all, Morton's musical tastes were developed by listening to Scott Joplin's ragtime tunes and he no doubt considered that his compositions were more technically complex and melodic than any boogie-woogie piece could ever be. He may even have been hoping to revive his flagging career by demonstrating that when commercial interest was high, he, the great Jelly Roll Morton, could also play boogie-woogie, and once again become the popular pianist that he had been in Chicago in the 1920s.

Touches of eight-to-the-bar motion in the left hand do appear in his playing here and there, but they are usually of brief duration. Two such instances that may be mentioned—and that are of especial interest on account of the terminology employed—occur at the endings of both "I Hate a Man Like You" and "Michigan Water Blues" (same title for all issues). In the first of these pieces, after completing the song, Morton says he had to pacify the young lady by playing some blues or, as he calls it, "some rolling stuff" and then follows with (left hand only) an eight-to-the-bar walking bass. Similarly, after completing the song in the second number, Morton plays some music using a four-to-the-bar "single running bass" that he then changes to an eight-to-the-bar walking bass that he speaks of as a "double running bass."

Possibly the best instance of Morton playing boogie-woogie, as it must have been heard in New Orleans, is in "Honky Tonk Music" (1938). The relationship of the ostinato bass, on this recording, with the treble passages suggests a greater interdependence between the two than is normally found in later boogie-woogie playing. This results in less dissonance and more melody, which may have been a general feature of the early forms of boogie-woogie emanating from New Orleans. One of the first professional engagements undertaken in the 1920s by the then young Chicago pianist Albert Ammons was as a member of a small band working on the excursion trains that took black people back to the South from Chicago for a short holiday. They were called honky-tonk trains and were fitted out with a drinks bar and a dance floor in a converted baggage car. These trips were frequently organized by the Democratic Party as political celebrations. A stop would be made at Memphis where the musicians often played a gig before traveling to New Orleans and then returning to Chicago. Ammons traveled to New Orleans on several occasions, and his playing of boogie basses was a revelation to local musicians who were familiar with their structure but not with the continuous, driving manner in which Ammons played them.

In his Library of Congress recordings, Morton often referred to boogie-woogie as honky-tonk music, a name derived from the cheap pleasure houses of the same name in New Orleans where the music was an important part of the entertainment. The association of the term *honky-tonk* with having a good time is similarly reflected in one of Meade Lux Lewis's accounts of the way in which his own train blues was given its title. In conversation with Alan Lomax when he recorded for the Library of Congress in 1938, Lewis said that he was playing the piece at a house party, possibly in 1923, shortly after he had constructed the choruses and decided on their order, when a guest inquired of him what the tune was called. Lewis told him that it was a train blues, which drew the response from the guest that as they were all together enjoying themselves at the party it ought rightfully to be called the "Honky Tonk Train Blues." This account suggests a strong link between one of the names by which the piano style, was known, and the environment in which it was succored.

The personal contribution of Jelly Roll Morton to the evolving boogie-woogie genre was not as an outstanding practitioner of the art whom others copied but, in a much more subtle way, as one composer whose rhythms and melodies provided a stimulus for embryonic boogie-woogie and blues pianists. This influence can only be hinted at as one of several that were absorbed by piano players, but there is some evidence to suggest it. Morton lived in Chicago between 1914 and 1917, having left New

Orleans, returning later in 1923 to begin recording. His tunes were all the rage, and during their heyday Morton and Tony Jackson played at all the popular bars, including the Elite, situated on State Street, in a neighborhood known as the Section. When Morton was appearing there, he would often play for hours and attract a large audience that not only filled the bar but overflowed onto the sidewalk. Entertainers were regularly seen and heard in person, before recordings and radio and cinema coverage of jazz superseded theatre and club appearances. Morton was certainly one of the most visible models for all up-and-coming pianists in the city through his personal appearances and sales of records and piano rolls. He introduced his audiences to the "Spanish Tinge," a tango or habanera rhythm that he featured in compositions such as "Mamamita" and "New Orleans Joys." It is a much more broken and staccato rhythm than the one used by Jimmy Yancey in his compositions, but it is reasonable to speculate that Yancey may have heard Morton playing and may have been influenced by the experience to the extent that he experimented with similar rhythms in his own playing. He most certainly did not pick them up from traveling to other countries, such as Cuba, or other regions in Latin America, because after his early juvenile work as an international traveling dancer he rarely left Chicago. Morton's influence is seen in one of the better known compositions of pianist Jimmy Blythe entitled "Lovin' Been Here and Gone to the Mecca Flats," which drew inspiration for its melody from a minor theme from his piece "Tom Cat Blues."

There were other regions, however, far removed from the Storyville District of New Orleans, where pianists could be heard playing boogie-woogie. One such center was Texas, where the seeds of the music grew and flourished. At the turn of the twentieth century, Texas supported crop farming and cattle rearing on its rich fertile prairies in the western counties and lumber and turpentine industries in those to the east, bordering on the state line with Louisiana. The oil industry and the burgeoning railway companies provided work as track layers for a black labor force that was still disenfranchised for all intents and purposes and dependent on menial forms of employment to eke out a living. The cities of Dallas, Shreveport, and Houston, and the port of Galveston drew in a black labor force to work in their many commercial enterprises. The majority of industries were served by a largely migrant workforce, and moving around the region with them in the 1920s and 1930s, continuing an earlier tradition dating from the beginning of the century, was a group of pianists who hitched rides on the trains of the Santa Fe Railroad Company serving the region. They provided a brash musical back-drop for the gambling, drinking, whoring, and dancing that were the popular forms of entertainment in many of the isolated communities near or within the workplaces. A more detailed consideration of the growth and decline of some of the industries in the South and the sustenance they gave to boogie-woogie piano playing is the topic of the next chapter. But it is interesting to note, in the context of identifying the names by which the piano style was known, that two of the colloquial terms prevailing in Texas—*Fast Western* and *Fast Texas*—were so called, it is said, to distinguish them from the "slow blues" of New Orleans. The "Galveston" was yet another Texan term for the piano style.[14]

Stepping back even further in time, a pianist known simply as "Birmingham" was recalled by several of Jelly Roll Morton's contemporaries and is mentioned in interviews made for the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University. Birmingham was thought to have been one of the earliest pianists to play boogie-woogie in New Orleans; as his name suggests, his base was Birmingham, Alabama. The importance of this city as a piano center is further acknowledged in blues pianist Perry Bradford's autobiography *Born with the Blues*, in which he mentions that Jelly Roll Morton knew a Birmingham pianist named Lost John who came to Chicago playing a piano style with a rolling bass before World War I.[15]

Not all early boogie-woogie pianists emerged from Alabama, but their influence in other regions of America cannot be gainsaid. A piano style using an ostinato left hand appears to have originated from the state and to have been transplanted to the East Coast before the end of the nineteenth century. It could be heard in the family rooms of beer saloons situated in the Tenderloin District of New York. The pianists were invariably youthful African-Americans from Alabama who played alongside a banjoist or harmonica player and were reported by H. M. Kay to be playing boogie-woogie in the Tenderloin District in the period leading up to the Spanish-American War (1898).[16] The music had certainly reached the mideastern region of America, just south of the Great Lakes, before 1910, where it was heard by Garvin Bushell (born 1902), a black clarinet player living in Springfield, Ohio. He started piano lessons when he was six and remembers hearing the popular "Maple Leaf Rag" at that time as well as the "fast western," confirming its later name of boogie-woogie and its origin as Texas.[17]

The accumulated evidence points to the existence of many minor figures playing in the boogie style, each displaying personal and regional features in their playing. The fact that the evidence is anecdotal and was collected in the 1930s onwards from musicians who would only remember as far back as the late 1890s frustrates any attempt to identify an earlier date for the emergence of boogie-woogie. This was probably followed by a cross-fertilization of regional boogie-woogie styles, particularly in the South, assisted by the newly laid railroads on which many itinerant pianists traveled. What can be said with a degree of certainty is that the states of Texas and Louisiana (and probably Mississippi) and the cities of Birmingham (Alabama) and New Orleans hosted some of the earliest pianists who played a rudimentary piano style utilizing a boogie-woogie ostinato bass. The several titles by which it was known imply, initially at least, a strong regional tie particularly in the South where the piano players worked clearly defined circuits. The piano style was given the name of boogie-woogie in 1928 with the release of Pinetop's recording, and this has been adopted as the generic title ever since. The two meanings of the term *boogie-woogie* have been retained to the present day: the heavy bass style of piano playing and the good time dance.

It might prove helpful to a better understanding of the music to reflect a little on its character and status, its purpose and function, and its audiences and venues. It was not heard in the drawing-rooms and salons of the highest stratum of society, it was shunned by the respectable law-abiding and church-going element of black society, and it was not performed (even) in the highest-class bordellos and brothels of the larger towns and cities. It was primitive and unsophisticated music—music for the rough, uncultured, uneducated, and frequently illiterate workingman, for the violent and undisciplined lawbreaker and wrongdoer, and for the pimp, pander, and prostitute. It was "low-down" music—music for the backwoods and the back streets. Apropos of this, one might consider Roy Carew's observation that he heard boogie-woogie in New Orleans in about 1904, but the music was usually classed as the naughty boy of the rag(time) family who neglected to study.[18]

Not only does it confirm that such music was of the back streets, but it also forwards the opinion that such music was considered inferior as music per se. If one had some technical ability as a pianist, creative talent as a composer of melodies, plus some knowledge of harmony in addition to the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords of the twelve-bar blues, then one could move out of the shadows and gain employment in the better establishments on the better streets in the bigger towns and cities—as did, for example, such ragtime and jazz pianists and composers as Tony Jackson and Jelly Roll Morton. If, on the other hand, one lacked these attributes, then one played the honky-tonks—containing (as Morton in his Library of Congress recordings has remarked) low-caliber clientele, usually unwashed, and frequently lousy—and pounded away in the barrelhouse and jukes, grinding out primitive and relatively simple boogie-woogies and blues. The blues was the only music suitable for the lowly barrelhouse, opined Walter Lewis.[19]

The term *boogie*, or derivations of it, appears in the titles of several tunes dating from the 1890s: "Dance of the Bogie" (1892), "The Bogie Coon" and "The Bogie Dance" (1898), "The Bogey Walk" (1900), "Boogie Boo" (1908), and "Hoogie Boogie Dance" (1909). These pieces appear as musical scores, but none has the defining attributes of boogie-woogie.[20] Although we do not comprehend the composer's intentions in using the term, there does appear to be an association between *boogie* and dancing or moving to a rhythm, possibly the cakewalk that anticipates Pinetop's composition. Finally, the earliest recorded reference to the musical term appears to be the "Boogie Man" (1880), composed by J. P. Skelly, which was published as sheet music for piano and described as a comic song and polka. The title and lyrics confirm that the reference is to the "Bogey" or "Boogie Man," an imaginary spiritlike creature whose presence was conjured up to discipline children through fear; the song's recurring chorus tells them to beware the boogie man. Clearly, these sentiments bear no relationship to boogie-woogie piano music as we understand it today.[21]

It is of interest to know that the term *boogie-woogie* has had other meanings that were used within the underground culture of black America and that also had no associations with music or dancing. *Boogie* was a term used for describing a form of secondary syphilis and sexual activity. An example of the latter can be found in a recording made by Bessie Jackson (alias Lucille Bogan) who sang of Boogie Alley in "Down in Boogie Alley" (1934; piano accompaniment by Walter Roland). *Boogie Alley* refers to "Prostitute Lane" or the "Street of Brothels." Her lyrics warn that no man is safe down there, and she is particularly worried about her own man because he frequently visits house number three. Boogie Alley's nefarious character is further emphasized by her recommendation that if returning to its precincts one should carry a razor or a .44 revolver. Incidentally, this piece is not, musically, of a boogie-woogie character. It is believed by some blues authorities, including Paul Oliver, that *booger-rooger* is a French derivative used for describing an uninhibited party and could be the parent of *boogie-woogie*. It has also been suggested by others that *boogie* is an alliteration of *bogey* as in *bogeyman* (see above), but why the connection with spirits? The dependency of pianists on train travel lends some credence to an association between *bogie*—the pair of pivoted wheels at the front of a flat truck—and *boogie*. It now remains to examine some of the industries and centers in the southern states that sustained this embryonic piano style.

NOTES

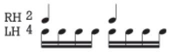
1. W. Russell, "Boogie-Woogie," in *Jazzmen*, ed. F. Ramsey and C. Smith (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1958), 183–205.
2. J. S. Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 203.
3. L. W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Press, 1977), 199.

4. Roberts, *Black Music*, 203; see also liner notes by Jean Paul Amouroux for *Boogie-Woogie Story*, vol. 1, Milan Jazz, CD 887795.

5. A. Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (London: Methuen, 1992), 170.

6. L. Harap, "Boogie-Woogie and the Piano Player," *Jazz Information*, March 1940, 2.

7. R. Blesh and H. Janis, *They All Played Ragtime* (London: Sedgwick and Jackson, 1958), 192. D. Harbinson's explanation of Blake's reference to "sixteen" suggests that ragtime is notated in 2/4 time, with the left hand playing the standard accompaniment of four quavers to the bar. This he interprets Blake as meaning:



That is, the left hand plays eight notes to the bar, but because of the 2/4 rotation, they are sixteenth notes (semiquavers). (Also, two of the standard walking basses use patterns consisting of sixteen actual notes—eight in the first bar walking up, and eight in the second bar walking down.

8. M. Stearns and J. Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 234.

9. R. Hall, liner notes, *The Barrelhouse Years*, vol. 20, *Piano Blues*, Magpie Records, PY 4420.

10. K. G. zur Heide, *Deep South Piano* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 33.

11. E. Borneman, "Boogie-Woogie," in *Just Jazz*, ed. S. Traill and G. Lascelles (London: Peter Davies, 1957), 13.

12. This is a copy of what is cataloged by the Archive of Folk Song (now, incidentally, the Archive of Folk Culture) of the Library of Congress as AFS 1688B1, "Boogie-Woogie Blues"; B2, "Albert Carroll Blues"; and B3, "Dialogue"; and this—in both cases the B-side of a twelve-inch 78 rpm record—has in more recent times been issued on the LP record *Jelly Roll Morton* (Swaggie) S.1314, the Library of Congress Recordings, vol. 4, which is simply titled "Albert Carroll." Thus, the conclusion to be drawn is that the piece Borneman is referring to is the one that occupies the first part of AFS 1688B and that bears the title "Boogie-Woogie Blues" or the alternative title of "Crazy Chord Rag." A certain sense of disappointment is experienced, however, when one listens to this piece, as it is a stomping four-to-the-bar, over-repetitive piece that is neither strictly ragtime nor boogie-woogie—and nowhere does Morton, in speaking on the record, provide any indication as to its origin, authorship, or title except in his concluding comment that everybody went wild when Buddy Bertrand played his piano blues.

13. R. Carew, "Of This and That and Jelly Roll," *Jazz Journal* 10, no. 12 (December 1957): 10–12.

14. M. McCormick, liner notes, *Texas Barrelhouse Piano, Robert Shaw* (Almanac 10), refers to *Fast Western* as the name by which boogie-woogie was first known, with confirmatory explanation by Andrew Everett—heard in volume 1 of the set—who worked in turpentine camps at the time. He identifies different pieces that he plays on his guitar, saying that he first picked them up incidentally from hearing them being played on a piano. See also S. Charters, liner notes, *The Barrelhouse Blues of Speckled Red* (Folkways, FG 3555) who refers to boogie-woogie as originally being known as *Fast Western* or *Galveston*—the Texas seaport situated on the Gulf of Mexico.

15. K. G. zur Heide, "Spotlight on Early Boogie-Woogie: Birmingham, Alabama," *The Blues* (Japan), no. 12 (May 1975): 6.

16. H. B. Kay, "8 to the Bar: Gay Ninety Reminiscences," *The Record Changer*, May 1949, 14, 20.

17. Levine, *Black Culture*, 202.

18. R. Carew, "Of This and That," 10–12.

19. K. G. Zur Heide, *Deep South Piano*, 13.

20. E. Virgo, correspondence with the author, March, 27, 1992.

21. J. P. Skelly, "The Boogie Man, 1880," *Library of Congress Sheet Music Archives* (1870–1885).

2

Industries and Centers Supporting Boogie-Woogie in the South

Originally, much of the United States of America was covered with primeval forest: great areas in the western half and a vast area in the eastern half that stretched from around the Great Lakes south through Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, and Oklahoma into Texas before curving back to meet the Gulf coast in the vicinity of the Brazos river and proceeding eastward through Florida and finally northward along the Atlantic seaboard. By 1662, when the word *lumber* first appeared in writing, there had been established a flourishing trade in the export of timber and its by-products—turpentine, pitch, and tar—to Europe. It was not until the 1830s, however, that large-scale lumbering operations commenced, and lumbering became a major industry as important as the railroad and iron industries.

By 1850, quite substantial inroads had been made into the virgin timber of the vast forest area in the eastern half of the United States, sufficient to be able to demarcate a southern portion, which still remained largely untouched. Known as the Southern Forests, it embraced parts of Georgia and Florida, and then moved westward into the states of Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana, where the prevalence of the pine tree gave the Piney Woods of Louisiana its name. From here the forested area ran into Texas and, from the point of view of this story, hosted the earliest recorded evidence of the musical style that was to become known as boogie-woogie. It was the black labor force working throughout the length and breadth of this entire region who, if not responsible for the creation of boogie-woogie, at least ensured its early appearance and survival in Texas by providing a sympathetic audience for the music.

There was some lumbering activity in the Southern Forest during the 1850s near Cedar Keys, Florida, and Amos Kent had established his lumber and brick company at Kentwood just south of the Mississippi/Louisiana border, but the lumber boom did not begin in earnest in the South until after the end of the Civil War in 1865. Shortly after 1880, owing to, in part, the introduction of the crosscut saw to fell the trees, and encouraged by the planters of the Mississippi Delta[1] who were eager for more forest land to be cleared for the planting of cotton, the lumber boom commenced in the area around Memphis, Tennessee; Mississippi; and Arkansas. During the next decade, in the 1890s, large-scale lumbering operations commenced in the western Louisiana/eastern Texas area, with J. H. Kirby—nicknamed "Prince of the Pines" and eventual owner of thirteen sawmills in east Texas—forming his Kirby Lumber Company in 1901. By 1909, half of the total of the lumber production for the whole of the United States came from the Southern Forests, but 1927 saw the lead in lumber production pass from the Southern Forests to the western states. The reason, of course, was the rapid depletion, denudation, and disappearance of the virgin forest: Eighty-three million acres of timberland had been laid waste by 1933. Companies went into liquidation as a consequence of having exhausted all the lumber; and in 1943 the entire town of Weirgate, Texas—which, in its life of only twenty-five years, had managed to denude a hundred thousand acres of longleaf pine—went to a wrecking company.

By 1942 there was not a great deal left of the vast virgin forest that originally covered all the eastern part of the United States, and although the enormous demand for timber created by the Second World War caused a temporary boom, the lumber boom proper was definitely at an end—the Big Time in the Big Woods was over.

Although, in the woods of the North and the West, the majority of lumberjacks were white men, in the Southern Forest, the labor force employed in all aspects of the timber business was predominantly black. White men filled the management and supervisory posts, but it was mainly the brawn and muscle of African-Americans that swung the axe or pushed and pulled on the crosscut saw to fell the trees of the Piney Woods. The resulting timber meant that the rails and ties of the spur railroad (the "dummy line") had to be extended deep into the forest to connect the remote logging camp to the main railroad. African-Americans also sweated and strained over the massive logs in the process of getting them from the forest to the sawmill, be it by skid road, watercourse, or river, or by loaded wagon drawn by locomotive, ox, horse, or mule. It was still mainly their brawn and muscle that finally manhandled the timber into position for cutting in the sawmill. It was hard and dangerous work. Men were killed or maimed by falling trees, were crushed when loaded flatcars or wagons overturned, and had their feet and legs smashed when a log slipped and rolled back on them; and while flying chokers and hooks could gash arms and bellies, so snapping cables could lash around to mutilate and even decapitate those unfortunate enough to be in the way.[2] Inside the sawmill, men were exposed to a number of crippling injuries, and not only lost fingers, hands, and arms because of the saws but also had their lungs damaged through inhaling the timber dust from the planing and sandpapering machines. The natural conditions of the forest could also make working life unpleasant: the heat and humidity, the snakes and the insects. In some cases, black lumberjacks—often referred to as "flatheads," incidentally—had to cover their bare backs with kerosene-soaked sacks as a protection against mosquitoes, and in swamps or flooded bottomlands had to work standing in water up to their hips. Hard and dangerous work necessitated a workforce of men who were equally tough; and a certain percentage of them comprised prison escapees, men fleeing woman trouble, and fugitives from knifing or shooting incidents—the remote camp in the forest providing an ideal hideaway. Convict labor was also deployed: Some of the southern states leased out their prisoners, in chains and under an armed guard, for work in the lumber camps. Convict labor and African-Americans also dominated the labor force in the turpentine camps of Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.

In the twenty-year period from 1890 to 1910, black labor increased phenomenally throughout the industry. In broad figures, it almost quadrupled to 14,309 from a base of 3,742 for lumbermen and craftsmen; almost doubled to 24,630 from 12,034 for turpentine farmers and laborers; and increased almost sixfold to 108,811 from 17,276 for those engaged in sawing and planing in the mills.[3] The resultant shows that at least from the early 1890s until the mid to late 1930s, there existed a potentially explosive, racially mixed, and captive labor force confined in closed, cramped, and isolated communities with few opportunities for personal expression or even personal freedom. The continuing presence of the cathartic music of boogie-woogie pianists and other instrumentalists in these communities must have assisted in some small measure to alleviate this volatility.

The logging camp normally consisted of a collection of shacks: bunkhouses for accommodating between seventy-five and 150 workers, a cookhouse, a company store, and a foreman's office.[4] The camps were established along defunct railway cuttings no longer required for transporting timber. The shacks were either converted railroad boxcars or boxlike structures built on railroad flatcars. The essential point is that they were on wheels, so that as the surrounding area of forest was reduced to stump land, and as the "dummy line" of the logging railroad was then laid farther into the depths of the forest, so the whole camp could be moved to its new location. One of the shacks functioned as the barrelhouse, honky tonk, or the juke joint catering to dancing and crap games, and in some instances, provided the services of a brothel.[5] Furnished, by the lumber company, with drink and a piano, it could be a rough, tough place. Crap games that started on a Saturday afternoon would keep going until Monday morning. Fighting, often razor slashings with one of the gamblers invariably getting killed, was fairly common. Such was the cheapness of life that the gambling activity continued, according to Little Brother Montgomery, using the still warm corpse to sit or stand on while the women continued dancing on top of the piano.[6]

These kinds of entertainment provided in barrelhouses serving the logging camps were also replicated in the turpentine and sawmill camps, the latter soon turning into sawmill towns completely owned and dominated by the lumber companies.[7] Such company towns, shabby and squalid, and lacking any sanitary facilities, saw workers paid irregularly and often in the form of tokens, which were redeemable only at the company store.[8] The local sheriff and police were often in the pay of the company, and during times of union unrest and strikes, the company would hire an additional force of gunmen to intimidate and control the workers; they also set barbed wire fences around the mill and lumber yard.

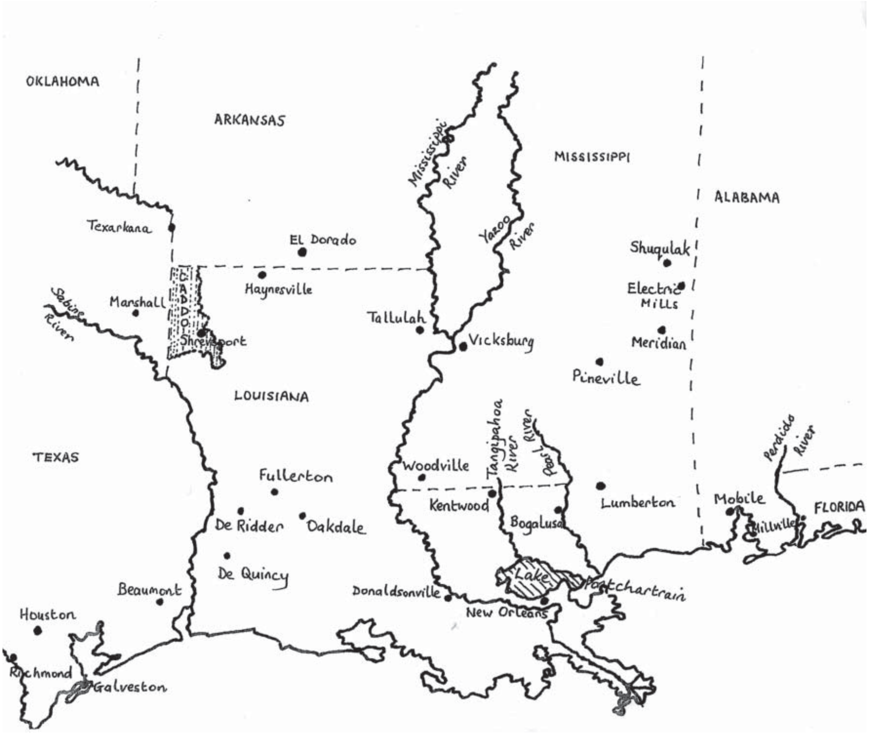
The names of some of these towns are indicative of their origins: Millville, Woodville, Pineville, Oakdale, Lumberton, Electric Mills, Cedar Keys, and Kentwood. Journeying between such sawmill towns, calling in at the larger towns, following the railroads, and traveling deep into the forest to visit the logging camps and the turpentine camps were itinerant black musicians—particularly, pianists. In the absence of a visiting musician, there is no reason to doubt that the workers would have made their own entertainment and played the piano. If they did, what they played and who they were are impossible to determine with any degree of certainty. The only clue we may have in attempting to answer this is given by guitarist and blues singer Huddie Leadbetter (Leadbelly); in a conversation with Frederick Ramsey Jr., Leadbetter said that when boogie-woogie was around in 1903 and 1904, people in his hometown walked the basses without really knowing what they were doing.[9]

Leadbelly seems to imply that even the untutored could get things under way and stimulate dancing if they had learned a rudimentary walking bass pattern. The attraction of the walking bass was its rhythmical stepping movement and simple, catchy melody in progressing up and down the keyboard. This was probably the earliest form of boogie-woogie played on the piano, possibly without any treble accompaniment in its most basic form.

Little Brother Montgomery spent his early years traveling on the Santa Fe trains playing the barrelhouse circuits of the South. It is not surprising that he should do this, having spent his impressionable childhood years in Kentwood, Louisiana, where his father owned a barrelhouse in which he listened to many pianists perform there and recreated some of their numbers in his own way from about the age of five. Shortly afterward, he could pick out a single note walking bass but had to wait until his teens before he could double up the notes to play an octave bass line. The Montgomery barrelhouse served the workforce of the previously mentioned Kent's Mill. It was a popular place for weekend revelry when card games like Georgia Skin, Cotch, and Monte were played. Dice shooting was another diversion. A room containing a piano was set aside for dancing. The first piano player that Little Brother remembers hearing, when he was four years old, was Ford who came from New Orleans. Others that he heard were Tommy Jackson, cousin of Tony Jackson, the ragtime pianist from New Orleans and friend of Morton; Bob Martin whom Montgomery described as a good blues pianist; and Loomis Gibson who apparently only knew three numbers, "Twelfth Street Rag," a waltz, and the blues. Montgomery began playing professionally on the Santa Fe circuit during the First World War, before moving to Chicago in 1928. He remembers hearing many different versions of the rolling-bass style during his time in the South, recalling its name as "Dudlow Joe." Certain barrelhouse circuits became associated with other musicians: Will Ezell played in Fullerton, Oakdale, De Ridder (a stronghold of the Brotherhood of Timber workers[10]), and De Quincy; Walter Lewis in Haynesville, El Dorado, Tallulah, and Vicksburg; and Poor Joe Williams traveled around Mobile Meridian, Electric Mills, Shuqulak, and on into Alabama.[11] (See map for all these circuits.[12])

The most common method of traveling the circuits was by freight train, and the pianists sat or lay on the metal crosspieces underneath the flat trucks, if they were unable to hitch a lift in the caboose off a friendly conductor or brakeman. Riding the rods was certainly the fastest and cheapest way of getting around the countryside for them, and they seem to have accepted the dangers and discomfort with stoicism. Other, less intrepid of the brotherhood picked up a train just as it was moving out of the marshaling yard, waiting for their moment to slip past the armed guards (bulls) and dog handlers, who were employed to deter them, before running and heaving themselves into an empty truck as the train gathered speed. This was the favored mode of departure, in which timing was critical, as the train could be safely boarded after the trucks had been inspected shortly before departure. More often than not, pianists would find themselves in the company of hobos and other down-and-outs seeking fresh pastures.

One pianist, Wesley Wallace, left a detailed account of a typical train ride from Nashville to East St. Louis in a famous piece entitled "Number 29," made in 1930 for the Paramount Company and available on *Piano*


OKLAHOMA
ARKANSAS
MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
Mississippi River
Yazoo River
Texarkana
El Dorado
Shuqulak
CADDO
Haynesville
Marshall
Sabine River
Electric Mills
Tallulah
Shreveport
Vicksburg
Meridian
Pineville
LOUISIANA
Tangipahoa River
Pearl River
Perdido River
TEXAS
Woodville
Fullerton
Kentwood
Lumberton
Mobile
FLORIDA
De Ridder
Oakdale
Bogalusa
Millville
De Quincy
Lake Pontchartrain
Beaumont
Donaldsonville
New Orleans
Houston
Richmond
Galveston

Blues, Volume 1: Paramount 1929–30 (Magpie, PY 4401). The bass plays in an unusual 6/4 time, typifying the relentless power of the engine, and is embellished by a series of chiming chords in the treble, reminiscent of a train bell. The climax of the journey is reached as the non-paying pianist shuts both eyes tightly and leaps from the train as it approaches East St. Louis. Rolling down the embankment and dusting himself down, he watches the receding train, secure in his anonymity. The wonderfully evocative recording by this little-known pianist illustrates the significance of this form of transport for pianists and how it acted as an inspiration for their music.

The Santa Fe railroad, with a main line running north from Galveston and Houston through Texas into Oklahoma, which, together with its side lines branching off to the east and the west, claimed to serve eighty-eight Texas counties. From playing in the back streets of Galveston, Houston, and Richmond, the Santa Fe group of pianists—including such men as Conish Pinetop Burks, Son Becky, Robert "Fud" Shaw, and Edwin "Buster" Pickens—traveled the numerous lines around the barrelhouse circuits to play in the various camps and towns. A splendid testimony is provided by Pickens—named the last of the itinerant barrelhouse pianists—and who was not discovered and recorded by Paul Oliver until relatively late in his career (1960). On his recording entitled *Santa Fe Train Buster Pickens* (Flyright Records, FLY 536), he describes hearing the mournful whistle of a distant Santa Fe train and likening it to a crying child. After successfully pleading for and obtaining a free and illegal ride on a freight train to Cowswitch, Pickens later meets Robertson, an aged piano player, now worn out by the incessant grind of the unpredictable and hazardous traveling. The older man invites him to take his place on the circuits, and Pickens accepts. Then Pickens reminds us of the brutal intensity of the commitment expected of the workforce in the sawmill, with the constant and relentless switching of manpower between those completing their shift and others waiting in the barrelhouse to take their place. Pickens, whose dark suit, bow tie, and contrasting quiff on an otherwise cropped head emphasized his status as a pianist and not a laborer, tells this personal tale while accompanying himself on the piano—and, it is worth noting, the music of this piano accompaniment is solid boogie-woogie.[13] A few years after making his recording, in 1964, Pickens was killed in a bar-room altercation.

The Santa Fe group displayed several distinctive features in their piano playing: a tendency to anticipate the beat, a fairly heavy touch, and the inclusion of ragtime runs and stride basses—the latter interspersed with boogie-woogie bass figures. The mixture gives their music a melodic quality compared to the cruder attempts of some pianists from other regions. Despite these common features, however, there are also certain distinctive embellishments in their style that identifies individuals with particular cities and even districts within cities. A number of popular themes were included in most repertoires, among which were "People, People"; "Piggly Wiggly Blues"—a parody on the grocery store of the same name; "The Cows"; "The Clinton"—a stopping place on the line in Oklahoma; "Hattie Green"; and "Black Gal," which became nationally known when it was recorded by Joe Pullam in his melancholic falsetto voice.

Pianists would remain at a lumber camp for as long as the mood took them before moving on to their next destination. The duration of their stay was determined partly by the reception they were accorded. To an extent, they were protected by their status as entertainers from some of the incipient violence that pervaded the camps, but it was not unknown for rough justice to be meted out if they did not perform to the satisfaction of the customers. Newcomers were regarded with suspicion, and as camp owners often resorted to the gun for maintaining order and control, it ill behooved an unknown pianist to attempt to break new ground without first being known or giving advance warning of their arrival. However, visitors to the barrelhouse were eagerly awaited for the news they brought from distant places as much as for the entertainment they provided. Many early pianists were called by exotic names: Jack the Bear, The Toothpick, Cat Eye Henry, and Papa Lord God were some who played the barrelhouses.

During their stay they were given food and a bed, but they were mainly dependent for financial payment on the unpredictable generosity of the clientele who gave tips or, more usually, supplied them with drinks because the workers were normally paid in tokens that could only be spent at the campsites—and this usually meant the barrelhouse. Some of the toughest places were the levee camps where black labor built, bolstered, and repaired the river banks—particularly along the great Mississippi River between Tennessee and Louisiana. Lomax reported that living conditions for this workforce were similar to lumber camps, and it was difficult for anyone to achieve sufficient financial independence to be able to leave them and move on.[14] There were frequently "paydays" involving no money, only an allowance that enabled the worker or his wife to draw victuals and other necessities from the commissary store. At the end of a week's labor, after the allowance had been drawn on, the worker was given what remained. Many were illiterate and innumerate and were frequently cheated of their rights by unscrupulous owners who overcharged them. Short of money, they were obliged to stay on at the camp, which served the purposes of the owners very well.

The mode of living of pianists had much in common with those for whom they played, and many succumbed to heavy drinking. It was this hazard and their method of traveling between destinations that shaped their tough existence and, in many instances, led to their premature deaths. It was also accepted that the extremes of temperature they experienced between riding the cold, merciless rods and the stifling alcohol-infected heat of the barrelhouse hastened their deaths. It was exceptional for a pianist not to be self-taught. The small amount of musical knowledge they acquired came from others in the brotherhood who shared ideas and passed on their own pieces in reciprocation for help given to them. They were proud men and engaged in fiercely competitive cutting sessions to demonstrate their mastery of the piano. The popularity of certain pianists was related to the range and variety of their repertoires, although this became less important as the weekend revelry reached its alcoholic climax. As this time approached, they pounded on their instruments and sang their songs in a high falsetto in order to be heard above the general hullabaloo. Technique was perfected in the hothouse of public performance, and each pianist became known for their unique rendition of a well-known number. Thus, Little Brother achieved fame for his playing of the "Vicksburg Blues," which he taught to Lee Green, a clothes presser from Louise, Mississippi, in 1922. Some of his own specialties were similarly reworked from versions of traditional blues that he learned from other