

= I 'm Just Wild About Harry =

" I 'm Just Wild About Harry " is a song written in 1921 with lyrics by Noble Sissle and music by Eubie Blake for the Broadway show Shuffle Along . " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " was the most popular number of the production , which was the first financially successful Broadway play to have African @-@ American writers and an all African @-@ American cast . The song broke what had been a taboo against musical and stage depictions of romantic love between African @-@ Americans .

Originally written as a waltz , Blake rewrote the number as a foxtrot at the singer 's request . The result was a simple , direct , joyous , and infectious tune enhanced onstage by improvisational dancing . In 1948 Harry S. Truman selected " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " as his campaign song for the United States presidential election of 1948 . Its success in politics led to a popular revival .

= = Background = =

Both " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " and the show Shuffle Along broke racial taboos . During the early 20th century African @-@ Americans were excluded from most mainstream theater in the United States : white Vaudeville refused to book more than one African @-@ American act on a bill and for over a decade no Broadway show used African @-@ American performers at all . Blake and Sissle met F. E. Miller and Aubrey Lyles for the first time at a fundraising benefit for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1920 . Vaudeville 's exclusionary practices limited bills to one African @-@ American act per night , so as a result the two leading African @-@ American acting teams knew of each other only by reputation . The four performers agreed that the only feasible way for African @-@ Americans to return to Broadway with dignity would be musical comedy . Miller proposed they collaborate .

The resulting show adapted plot and characters from Miller and Aubrey 's Vaudeville comic sketches with music by Blake and Sissle . Although the music of Shuffle Along was new to the public , only three compositions were actually written for the production : " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " , " Bandana Days " , and " Love Will Find A Way " . The other songs used in the show were material that Blake and Sissle had tried unsuccessfully to sell to Tin Pan Alley . " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " and " Love Will Find a Way " in particular were politically risky for the era .

" If anything approaching a love duet was introduced in a musical comedy , it had to be broadly burlesqued , " recalled black poet and lyricist James Weldon Johnson . " The reason ... lay in the belief that a love scene between two Negroes could not strike a white audience except as ridiculous . "

The title and chorus of the musical 's most famous number challenge that taboo : I 'm just wild about Harry and he 's just wild about me is a clear statement of mutual romantic interest . Sissle and Blake risked the public 's rejection by shedding most of the racial stereotypes that had been the norm for theatrical performances .

= = Creation = =

" I 'm Just Wild About Harry " underwent a complete rewrite during rehearsals and was nearly cut from the show . Blake 's original version of the song was a Viennese waltz , but according to the authors of America 's Songs , performer Lottie Gee encouraged rewriting the number as an up @-@ tempo one @-@ step . Blake disliked the suggestion and feared it would ruin his waltz but capitulated after Sissle agreed with Gee .

Audiences did not respond well to the revised version during early performances . Blake was on the verge of dropping the number from the show when a dancer took ill and had to be replaced . The understudy was a singer who did not know the steps , so when he was unable to follow the routine he ignored it and improvised . America 's Songs quotes Sissle 's recollection of how the performance saved the song : " He dropped out of line and with a jive smile and a high @-@ stepping routine of his own , he stopped the show cold . "

= = Structure = =

Alec Wilder and James T. Maher call " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " a " strong , direct , simple song , the principal device of which is a strong fourth beat tied to the down beat " . The song moves in short melodic bursts characteristic of the era : lighthearted but rhythmic .

" It 's of the genre of Hallelujah , Fine and Dandy and all those cut @-@ time theater rhythm songs . It uses a lot of step @-@ wise writing and only one note out of its C @-@ major scale , a d sharp . For a theater song it is not rangy , being only an octave and a third . "

The tightly rhymed lyrics comprise a straightforward set of comparisons that border on comic exaggeration .

The heavenly blisses

Of his kisses

Fill me with ecstasy .

He 's sweet just like chocolate candy

And just like honey from the bee .

Yet Furia and Lasser describe the song 's overall impact as an infectious delight .

Within the context of the play , the number occurs early in the second act when the leading lady declares her love for the leading man . Her father is the wealthiest man in town , which poses obstacles to the match . The overall plot concerns a mayoral race in all @-@ black Jimtown where two dishonest grocery store owners vie for political office . One of the corrupt grocers wins the race shortly afterward and appoints the other chief of police . Harry leads the community protest that returns the two grocers to their store , and wins the girl .

= = Reception = =

Shuffle Along was a significant theatrical success that " ended more than a decade of systematic exclusion of blacks from the Broadway stage " . The show opened in New York City at Daly 's 63rd Street Music Hall on May 23 , 1921 and ran 504 performances . The venue was actually a converted lecture hall that lacked a proper stage or orchestra pit . The show overcame financial straits and a poor location to become " the first all @-@ black musical to enjoy a long run and be treated as more than an oddity . "

" On the New York opening night , the audience loved the show . Influential critics like Alan Dale , George Jean Nathan , and Heywood Broun were highly enthusiastic . Gradually Shuffle Along built up a cult status . So big were the crowds that the police had trouble controlling the traffic . Eventually they had to make Sixty @-@ third a one @-@ way street . A black show was back on Broadway , even if 63rd Street , a long way uptown , was barely Broadway ! In Eubie Blake 's words , ' It wasn 't Broadway but we made it Broadway . ' "

" I 'm Just Wild About Harry " was the most popular number of the show . Blake conducted the show 's orchestra and recorded the song for the Victor label . Noble Sissle 's 1937 recording for the Victory label altered the original tone considerably in order to showcase the talents of clarinetist Sidney Bechet . Other early recordings include those by Benny Krueger , Louis Mitchell and Paul Whiteman .

In 2016 , it returned to Broadway in a revival of Shuffle Along .

= = Use in other media = =

Judy Garland sang the piece as one of several songs in a minstrel show in the M @-@ G @-@ M musical Babes in Arms (1939) .

Alice Faye sang it with Louis Prima 's band in the 1939 film Rose of Washington Square . It was signature tune of Hi Gang ! , a popular BBC Radio comedy show of the early WWII years , starring the American actors Bebe Daniels and her husband Ben Lyon , who had settled in London , and the British comedian Vic Oliver . In 1946 , Daffy Duck sang a chorus of it in Daffy Doodles .

In 1948 " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " underwent a revival when Harry S. Truman selected it as his campaign song for the presidency of the United States . Republicans and some Democrats that year joked , " I 'm just mild about Harry . " The next year Al Jolson performed it in the film Jolson Sings Again and the song became a jazz standard . This return to popularity briefly reunited Blake and Sissle for the first time since 1933 . In 1955 , the song again appeared in the Warner Brothers cartoon short One Froggy Evening as one of the songs sung by Michigan J. Frog during his dance routine . Writing about American popular songs in 1972 , Wilder and Maher call " I 'm Just Wild About Harry " the only enduringly popular song from Shuffle Along . On The Muppet Show , Jean Stapleton performed the song with the mad bomber and pyrotechnician Muppet character , Crazy Harry , who accompanies her singing on his explodaphone , which consisted partly of a line of plunger blasting machines wired to set off numerous explosive charges in time with the lyrics .

= = Other versions = =

Kathy Linden released a version of the song on her 1958 album , That Certain Boy .