

# **THE STORY OF JAZZ**

---

**MARSHALL W. STEARNS**

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

**LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK**

## 1 | Jazz and West African Music

In reply to the sweet old lady's question, 'What is jazz, Mr. Waller?' the late and great Fats is supposed to have sighed: 'Madam, if you don't know by now, DON'T MESS WITH IT!' Fats Waller had a point there. Whether you hear it in New Orleans or Bombay—they play something like it there, too—jazz is a lot easier to recognize than to describe. Suppose we define it temporarily as the result of a 300-year-old blending in the United States of two great musical traditions, the European and the West African. It follows that, in a musical culture predominantly European, the qualities that make jazz a little different and immediately recognizable probably have something to do with West Africa.

What is the connection between jazz and West African music? Perhaps the most obvious similarity is the rhythm—not that a West African tribesman would like jazz, because he wouldn't, the blending has gone too far. But take a tribal ceremony in Dahomey: the musicians are playing rattles, gongs, and other percussion instruments, while the tribesmen are dancing, singing, clapping, and stamping. The main instrument, however, is the drum—usually a set of three drums known to musicologists as a drum choir—because the gods speak through the drums, the dancers face the drums, and the tribe forms a circle around them.

At its peak, the sound may seem like a combination of disordered pneumatic drills. The music is polyrhythmic, that is, two or more separate rhythms are being played at the same time, maybe five or six. A common foundation for West African music is a combination of 3/4, 6/8, and 4/4 time signatures. It's as if an orchestra were playing the same tune as a waltz, a one-step, and a fox trot—all at the same time. And of course the singing, clapping, and stamping add further rhythmic complexities.

To a highly trained classical musician this West African music may sound like chaos. For the West Africans have no written music—they play from memory and by ear—and they don't follow anything as regular as the bar-lines of our European system of notation. In fact, in terms of one of our measures their rhythms seem to change right in the middle, a great stumbling block to musicologists when they try to write them down. And yet even the untrained listener can feel the power and drive and can somehow sense that the complicated parts of this rhythmic juggernaut fit together.

By comparison, our jazz rhythms are fairly simple. We've come a long way but we certainly haven't caught up and maybe never will. Down in New Orleans, for example, some of the old-timers are still playing 'Didn't He Ramble' on the way back from a funeral, but it sounds like a march. Jazz is traditionally approximated in notation as 4/4 or duple meter—actually it's more complex—and this march rhythm is basic. You can hear it plainly in the music of a New Orleans brass band, but something new has been added—the music (*swings*). And it is apparent that this new ingredient didn't come from Europe.

Theorists tell us that there is no limit to the complexities that can be superimposed upon march rhythm—and that is what jazz is doing. The basis of jazz is a march rhythm but the jazzman puts more complicated rhythms

on top of it. He blows a variety of accents between and around, above and below, the march beat. It's a much more complicated process than syncopation, which is usually defined as stressing the normally weak beat, for syncopation sounds unutterably old-fashioned to a jazzman. A regular six-piece band playing in the New Orleans style can create rhythmic complexities which no machine yet invented can fully diagram.

At the start of a recording session Louis Armstrong, handkerchief in one hand and trumpet in the other, stands in front of the microphone and stamps out a steady rhythm. As the band picks it up, Armstrong's foot doubles the beat and starts tapping twice as fast. And as he sings and plays the trumpet he stresses accents *around and between* the taps of his foot. Recorded examples show that he has broken the measure down to sixteenths at least, but this is a standard jazz procedure.

Erroll Garner is justly famous for what jazzmen call 'fooling around with the beat,' because he doesn't seem to let his left hand know what his right hand is doing. In general, his left hand plays a steady 4/4 march rhythm, quite opposite to the modern trend, but his right hand is playing the melody in a variety of changing tempos: first he drags behind and then he more than catches up in constantly varying fractions of the beat. The effect is schizophrenic, like rubbing your stomach in one direction and the top of your head in another. A good example of this is at the beginning of the second chorus of 'What Is This Thing Called Love?' by Garner (Roost 606).

Here is a quality that gives jazz some of its appeal. Psychologically, Garner's steady left hand creates and fulfills the expectancy of a continuous rhythm. His lag-along right hand, however, sets up a contrasting tension which is released when, by means of more unexpected accents, he catches up. It's like a sprinter who saves himself from fall-

ing on his face by an extra burst of speed. It's also a kind of rhythmic game. The effect on the listener varies: he may want to sing, dance, shout, or even hit somebody. Somehow he wants to express himself.

Understanding and enjoying this kind of rhythmic complexity is entirely a matter of training. Contrary to the popular notion, nobody is born with a fine sense of rhythm—people simply learn it, sometimes quite unconsciously. The outstanding student of the subject, Richard A. Waterman of Northwestern University, has a phrase for what it takes: 'metronome sense.'<sup>1</sup> If your metronome sense is highly developed, you can *feel* a foundation rhythm when all you hear is a shower of accents being superimposed upon it. The story of the Congo natives being thrilled by the intermittent explosions of a one-cylinder gasoline engine may well be true. Their highly conditioned ears supplied a rhythmic common denominator.

Metronome sense is important in jazz, too. When one jazzman confides that another 'has no beat'—and there is no harsher criticism—he is impugning his metronome sense. The sad plight of the classical musician trying to play jazz is axiomatic, and Mr. José Iturbi's recording of boogie-woogie is a fair example (Victor 10-1127). It doesn't swing. You don't need a highly developed metronome sense in most classical music because this music places primary emphasis upon the up-beat and the down-beat—four to a bar—the accents jazz uses as points of departure.

So something of this engaging rhythm that identifies a lot of jazz for us came from West Africa. It's a survival—diluted, to be sure. There's nothing quite like it in Europe, the source of most of the rest of our music. The intensity and complexity of the rhythm depend on the jazz band you are hearing, of course, but even Guy Lombardo is playing rhythms that were probably unknown to our dance music fifty years ago. As time goes on, jazz rhythms

are spreading all over the world and their complexity and intensity are increasing.

Just about every kind of music associated with the American Negro has this rhythmic spark. It also has a second and perhaps just as important quality: the blue note and the blues scale, or to put them both together, blue tonality. At her annual concert at Carnegie Hall, Mahalia Jackson, 'Queen of the Gospel Singers,' creates an almost solid wall of blue tonality. It's not a matter of tempo. She'll sing a slow tune that we all know by heart, 'Silent Night,' for example—adding embellishments that take your breath away. As a member of a Sanctified Church in Mount Vernon once told me: 'Mahalia, she add more flowers and feathers than anybody, and they all is exactly right.' She breaks every rule of concert singing, taking breaths in the middle of a word and sometimes garbling the words altogether, but the full-throated feeling and expression are seraphic.

Here again, we are close to a quality that gives jazz much of its appeal. To be technical, two areas in the octave—the third and the seventh in the scale (E-flat and B-flat in the scale of C)—are attacked with an endless variety of swoops, glides, slurs, smears, and glisses. In other words, a singer, or instrumentalist, takes certain notes and cradles and caresses them lovingly, or fiercely. Of course, you have to know what you're doing. Way back in 1930, Rudy Vallee wrote with what might be called beginner's luck: 'I have played a certain note barbaric in quality on my saxophone very softly, and have watched its effect upon a crowd, the livening up of young legs and feet . . .' <sup>2</sup> He had found one of THE notes, a blue note. (By 1950, the 'flattened fifth' was in the process of becoming a blue note.)

With the addition of a few blue notes, the entire harmony becomes blue, and blue tonality results. It occurs in almost all American Negro music, vocal and instrumental,

and especially in jazz. It can be heard in the field-holler and the work song, the spiritual and gospel, minstrelsy and ragtime. Above all, you can hear it in the bittersweet mixture of the blues. But it doesn't stop there. Many Tin-Pan Alley tunes are saturated with it and several classical composers have dabbled in it. Blue tonality has colored America's musical life.

Where does blue tonality come from? It can't be found in Europe. Something very much like it occurs in West Africa, although we don't know how extensive it is. The influence of Arabic music by way of the Moslem penetration of West Africa is a distinct possibility. There are elaborate theories about the superimposition of African pentatonic (5-note) on European diatonic (7-note) scales in the United States that resulted in two 'uncertain' or blue areas. These theories may well be right—although the diatonic scale also occurs in Africa. When Bessie Smith sings (Columbia LP 4810):

24 Woke up this mornin', with an awfu' achin' head,  
My good man had lef' me, jes' a room an' a empty bed,  
*W.E.W.*

we hear and at once recognize blue tonality and the indisputable creation of the American Negro. We also share a mood that is just about universal.

Less obvious characteristics of West African music help to give jazz its unique flavor. A real Negro revival meeting, says Alan Lomax, 'is the high point of American folk-theatre.'<sup>8</sup> The tent church of the Rev. A. A. Childs in Harlem during the summer of 1952 furnished a good example. For the Reverend, following a long tradition that goes back before the American Revolution, is a mighty preacher, and his congregation is quick to respond.

A simple form holds the entire performance together: the call-and-response pattern. Known among musicians as antiphony, it combines the preacher's call (variable tim-

ing) with the congregation's response (regular timing). Now and then they overlap and accidental harmony results. The words aren't too important, but the preacher's attack varies endlessly. In Buffalo, Elder Beck and his Junior Choir recorded wave after wave of rhythmic sound to the call, 'What do you think of Jesus?' and the high-pitched and fervent response: 'He's all right' (King 4394).

The call-and-response pattern occurs throughout jazz. Bessie Smith's recording of 'Empty Bed Blues' (banned, they say, in Boston) is a classic example. As Miss Smith specifies her woes, Charlie 'Big' Green answers her with interpretative cries and growls on his trombone. He sounds more than sympathetic. The 'chase' choruses of Bix and Tram during the late 'twenties offer another example. In 1953, when the blues shouter Wynonie Harris played the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, he had a tenor saxophonist honking responses that would curdle the blood of a lesser man. In the big bands, the pattern becomes a part of the arrangement. The brass and reed sections in Benny Goodman's swing band of the 'thirties echoed and expanded upon each other's phrases.

In the 'fifties, the small experimental bands used the pattern most clearly when they played 'the fours'—each musician in turn soloing for four bars. An extemporaneous continuity is sometimes established, with each soloist commenting on the phrases of his predecessor. It often becomes competitive. Following trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, the saxophonist Charlie Parker astonished his colleagues at a Carnegie Hall concert in 1950 by repeating Gillespie's complicated phrases, wringing them out, and hanging them up to dry with additional embellishments—in the same time interval. No one else could have done it. (Part of the performance is preserved on a bootleg label, Black Deuce.)

We find the call-and-response pattern in American Ne-

gro music from the early work song on—wherever there are two persons to create a dialogue, or a man and his instrument upon which he can construct a reply. The same pattern is found everywhere in West Africa. There was a musical tradition, however, that confirmed the West African in his use of the call-and-response pattern and hastened the blending: the psalm-singing style of New England (as early as 1650), a style that disappeared in the cities as the country grew but survived in rural areas along the expanding frontier where it had been brought by the Yankee music teacher. Everybody sang his own version of the tune (which thus added improvised embellishments) and the performance was held together by 'lining out,' that is, the preacher spoke the words first and then the congregation sang them. The call-and-response form continued to be employed long after everybody knew the words.<sup>4</sup> When an African heard this folk style, he must have felt at home.

Another characteristic of jazz that probably derives from the music of West Africa may be called the 'falsetto break.' When Blind Sonny Terry is led out on the stage of Town Hall, clutching his precious harmonica, the audience is in for an evening of what he describes as 'whooping.' (Listen to 'Hootin' Blues' on Gramercy 1004.) Whether it's a fox-hunt or a lonesome train or simply the blues, Terry laces the music with electrifying falsetto yells. They're something like a cowboy's 'Yippee' except that they can also be far more subtle, varied, and above all, 'bluesy.' The street-cry and field-holler of the American Negro are earlier examples of the same tradition.

In 1955, Count Basie's singer, Joe Williams, explaining the 'yells' he inserts in his vocals, said, 'I heard those street cries on Chicago's South Side.' A 1953 jukebox hit by Tommy Ridgley, 'Looped' (Imperial 5203) was founded upon a convincing mixture of the falsetto break and the

hiccup. The falsetto break had been built into instrumental jazz at an early date. Thinking of his instrument as an extension of his voice, the jazzman often employs a similar technical effect. The (falsetto break) is common, of course, in West Africa and survives in the South today.

To return for a moment to the tribesmen and drums in Dahomey, West Africa, the listener could also have heard—in addition to the complicated rhythms—the use of the falsetto break, blue tonality, and the inevitable call-and-response pattern. They have all survived, in whole or in part, in the music of the United States and may be identified in the new blend—jazz.

Are there any other characteristics of West African music that survive in jazz today? Indeed there are, but they consist of a strange assortment of apparently unrelated details. One characteristic, for example, is simply a matter of the kind of words that go with a song. The New Orleans Creole clarinetist Albert Nicholas still sings this to a rhumba rhythm (Circle 1018):<sup>5</sup>

Si vous tchoué ain poule pour moi,  
Mélé li dans ain fricassay,  
Pas blié pou mête la sauce tomate  
Avec ain gros gallon di vin  
  
Sali dame, sali dame, sali dame, un bon jour,  
Sali dame, laissez mo woir, to to, woir to-to.

The language is Creole French and the New Orleans Creoles call it a 'signifying song.'

In spite of its gaiety and rhumba-like rhythms, this song cuts two ways and the *sali dame* (dirty lady) to which it is addressed is about to have her reputation shredded. ('To-to' means both 'toe' and 'backside.') In West Africa, these numbers are called songs of allusion and the people at whom they are directed actually pay the singers to stop singing and go away. A good man who improvises imagina-

tively can make a fine living out of it. The same kind of song, an archaic and rhythmic type of calypso, pops up in Trinidad as a devastating political weapon.

The lyrics of many jazz tunes are salted with the same loving insults. They occur especially in the blues. Bessie Smith sings 'Dirty No Gooder's Blues,' among others, and Louis Armstrong puts new fire into the standard 'You Rascal You' (Okeh 41504):

I'll be standing on the corner high,  
When they bring your body by,  
I'll be glad when you're dead  
You rascal you,

while Wynonie Harris shouts 'Don't Roll Those Bloodshot Eyes at Me' (King 4461). For maximum contrast, however, compare Tin-Pan Alley's neurotic statement: 'I Want a Paper Dolly All My Own' with the harsh but healthy billet-doux: 'You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog' (Peacock 1612), as sung by Willie Mae 'Big Mama' Thornton.<sup>6</sup>

A further combination of West African elements has survived almost intact in the ring-shout of the deep South. John and Alan Lomax ran full tilt into one in Jennings, Louisiana, in 1934, and recorded it for the Library of Congress. 'The community had recently re-introduced the ring-shout as a means of attracting and holding in the church the young people who wanted to dance.'<sup>7</sup> Lomax has also seen shouts in Texas, Mrs. Lydia Parrish saw them in Georgia, James Weldon Johnson saw them in Haiti and Florida, and I have seen them in South Carolina, within recent years.

The dancers form a circle in the center of the floor, one in back of another. Then they begin to shuffle in a counter-clockwise direction around and around, arms out and shoulders hunched. A fantastic rhythm is built up by the

rest of the group standing back to the walls, who clap their hands and stomp on the floor. Wave after wave of song is led by the shouting preacher, whose varying cry is answered by the regular response of the congregation. Suddenly, sisters and brothers scream and spin, possessed by religious hysteria, like corn starting to pop over a hot fire.

This is actually a West African circle dance. It survived more or less by accident. The Protestant religion discourages dancing and the playing of instruments. But dancing is defined as crossing the feet, and in this religious ceremony of West Africa the dancers never cross their feet anyway. Further, drum rhythms can be easily improvised by clapping and stomping. The only real difference is that the preacher is shouting, moaning, and groaning in English, although the words are sometimes as satirical as they are religious.

In spite of the seeming chaos, everything is under control. Whenever a sister becomes possessed, the people around her take care that she doesn't hurt herself. The same thing occurs in Africa and the West Indies, and I have witnessed it in Haiti. For the whole point of the occasion is to 'get religion' by becoming possessed—but in the correct way. This is a complicated and sacred ritual. It seems to offer, among other things, what the sociologists call an emotional release and perhaps that is why, or so they say, that such a thing as a nervous breakdown is unknown in West Africa.

The continued existence of the ring-shout is of critical importance to jazz, because it means that an assortment of West African musical characteristics are preserved, more or less intact, in the United States—from rhythms and blue tonality, through the falsetto break and the call-and-response pattern, to the songs of allusion and even the motions of the African dance. And an entire way of life has survived with it. Many jazzmen, even among the ultra-

moderns, are familiar with all or part of it because they lived with or near one of the Sanctified Churches during childhood. As the Elders of this church are supposed to have observed: 'The Devil shouldn't have all those good rhythms.' The ring-shout is a reservoir of West African qualities that are continually giving new life to jazz.

But how and why did European and West African music blend so easily? The fact is that, unlike other musics of the world, they are very much alike.<sup>8</sup> In ancient times, Europe and Africa were connected—part of the same continent—according to archaeologists. Folk tales, religions, prehistoric arts, and implements of the two areas are similar. So is the music. European and West African music both use the diatonic scale (the white notes on the piano keyboard) in their tunes, and both employ a certain amount of harmony. Now and then, the diatonic scale is found elsewhere in the musics of the world but harmony nowhere else.

This similarity is between European folk music and West African tribal music, however, and does not apply to classical music. The main difference is that European folk music is a little more complicated harmonically and African tribal music is a little more complicated rhythmically. They are about equal in regard to melody. At the extremes, modulation from key to key is unknown in Africa and multiple meters are unknown in Europe, but when the African arrived in the New World the folk music that greeted him must have sounded familiar enough, except for a lack of rhythm. The blending has proceeded on many levels in a variety of ways.

The improvised drum solo is an outstanding example. It occurs in all jazz periods from Baby Dodds to Max Roach. It also occurs in West Africa. It is not found, however, in any European music. So the spectacular drumming of gum-chewing, tousled-haired Gene Krupa, the frantic

idol of the bobby-soxers in the 'thirties, for example, is essentially African in concept. The instruments upon which he is pounding are European, but the general idea probably originated in West Africa and nowhere else. And now it has traveled all around the world.



## 2 | From Africa to the New World

What are the roots of jazz and how did they take hold in the New World? We know quite a bit about the European music that contributed to jazz, but our knowledge of the African music that became an essential part of it is still scanty. Many African musical characteristics survived in the New World—adapted, blended, and changed to fit new conditions. The range and intensity of these survivals, however, is a subject that needs more study. Still and all, we do have enough information at present to indicate certain general patterns. Indeed, some day we may be able to identify the exact rhythms of the particular tribes that helped to create jazz.

It is becoming clear, for example, that the various stages in the development of the slave trade had a decisive influence on what part of Africa the slaves came from, as well as where they were taken in the New World. It was once thought that the slaves came from all over Africa and that only weak and 'inferior' Africans were captured and sold into slavery. Under such conditions, African customs would have a poor chance of survival. But the majority of slaves came from the West coast of Africa—especially Senegal, the Guinea coast, the Niger delta, and the Congo—as anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits has shown,<sup>1</sup> while inter-tribal raids and dynastic wars in West Africa

led to the selling of kings and priests into slavery, people who were specialists in their own tribal music and rituals.

Thus, the fact that many West African customs, musical and otherwise, survived in the New World is not surprising. Further, these customs were continually renewed by the arrival of more Africans for, although the slave trade was banned by the United States in 1808, contraband slaves directly from Africa were smuggled into the country as late as Civil War days. At the same time, people from the West Indies with strong African traditions were immigrating to this country as, indeed, they still do to this day. Since West Africa had no literature, customs and rituals were always memorized and handed down by example and word of mouth. And elements of West African music, invisible and preserved in a state of mind that cannot be policed, are still very much with us.

Certain patterns evolved with the slave trade. As the search for slaves advanced down the West coast of Africa from around Dakar all the way to the Congo, first Portuguese traders, then Dutch, and then English—with the French a poor second—dominated the trade. Each European power supplied its own colonies in the New World with slaves from the tribes it had plundered, and the planters in each of the colonies naturally came to prefer the tribesmen supplied by the mother country. England, a partial exception, tended to sell slaves to anyone who would buy, and Spain tended to buy from anyone who would sell. Colonial preferences nevertheless became generally fixed.

Accordingly, Brazilian planters—supplied at an early date with Senegalese slaves by Portuguese traders—preferred Senegalese slaves thereafter. In the same way, Spanish planters came to prefer Yorubas, English planters Ashantis, and French planters Dahomeans. There were many exceptions, of course, but the over-all pattern survives to this day: the predominant African music in Cuba (originally

Spanish) is Yoruban, in Jamaica (British) Ashanti, and in Haiti (formerly French) Dahomean. Now the Dahomeans were the original *vodun* worshippers—the snake god Damballa is one of their deities—and the fact that New Orleans was once a French colony helps to explain why this city is the 'oodoo' capital of the United States today and may give us a clue as to why jazz was born in New Orleans.

At a later stage, after the Africans had arrived in the New World, the differing environments began to shape new patterns. The African fitted in as best he could and, since it was virtually the West African custom to adopt the deities and attitudes of one's conquerors, he soon began to assimilate the new culture. The colonies reflected the cultures of their mother countries and the slave met with a rather different music, religion, and attitude toward himself in the different colonies.

Much depended, for example, on whether the slave was sold to a British-Protestant or a Latin-Catholic colony. In the first place, the music of the Latin colonies, and especially the Spanish, had more rhythmic life. Perhaps because of the Moorish conquest of Spain in the Middle Ages—the Moors came from North Africa—Spanish music employed elements of improvisation and complex rhythms. An example that survives to this day is the *flamenco* (compare also the *fado* of Portugal). And the numerous church festivals in Latin colonies gave the slaves many opportunities to hear this music.

On the other hand, the Protestant hymns in British colonies were often 'droned out . . . like the braying of asses,' according to John Adams.<sup>2</sup> With the remote exception of the 'Scotch snap,' an elementary bit of syncopation that occurs only incidentally in jazz (hum the tune of 'Gin a Body Meet a Body Comin' thro' the Rye'), the slave heard little or no music with any rhythmic complexity in the African sense of the word. Perhaps the march came as

close as any type of music to appealing to the African, simply because it lent itself to the addition of superimposed rhythms in the African manner.

In the second place, the general attitude and point of view of the Latin-Catholic planters, as contrasted to the attitude of the British-Protestant slave-owners, permitted the survival of more West African traditions. If a planter was Portuguese, Spanish, or French, he dominated the lives of his slaves outwardly—and often with cruelty—but he didn't seem to care about what a slave thought or did in his spare time so long as it didn't interfere with production. Perhaps the attitude of the planters was influenced by centuries of civilized interchange between the Mediterranean countries and North Africa. A kind of cultural *laissez faire* existed whereby the African retained his customs if only by default.

With a British owner, however, a slave was likely to change his ways more quickly, discarding his own traditions and adopting the new. For the British did not specialize in large plantations and each slave-owner possessed fewer slaves. Thus, a slave could come to know his master more easily. Sometimes he was employed as a house slave and, watching his master, became ashamed of his own customs which were thought savage and barbaric. Wanting to improve his condition, he frequently made a point of concealing his own traditions which, in many cases, were consequently forced underground.

Moreover, British-Protestant slave-owners appeared to be much more concerned about what a slave did or thought in his spare time and whether or not he was a Christian. One of the early justifications of slavery argued that it converted the heathen. But then, it followed logically that, once converted, a slave should be a free Christian. The State of Virginia solved this problem as early as 1667 by decreeing: 'Baptism doth not alter the condition of the

person as to his bondage or freedom.' Thereafter slaves were permitted to become Christians and remain slaves. By contrast, this problem never bothered Latin colonies. Planters simply assumed, according to the *Code Noir*, that slaves remained slaves whether or not they joined the Catholic Church.

In the third place—and perhaps of greatest importance—whether a slave became a Protestant or a Catholic had a direct effect on the survival of his native music. For a West African in a Latin-Catholic colony soon discovered that a great many Catholic saints bore interesting resemblances to his own gods.<sup>3</sup> The church had pictures of the saints—inexpensive and plentiful chromolithographs—which suggested pointed parallels. St. Patrick, pictured driving the snakes out of Ireland, reminded the slave of his own Damballa, the snake god of the Dahomeans. So on St. Patrick's day, the slaves played the drum rhythms sacred to Damballa and worshipped both Damballa and St. Patrick at the same time and on the same improvised altar.

The ease with which West African and the Catholic religions fused—a process called syncretism by the anthropologists—as well as the extreme flexibility of the slave when it came to adopting new deities is strikingly illustrated in a photograph by Earl Leaf of a Haitian *vodun* altar. Among a variety of African charms and fetishes are several chromolithographs of Catholic saints and religious scenes, plus a forceful photograph of Admiral Ernest J. King of the United States Navy. Clad in a white uniform and staring resolutely forward, the admiral is obviously a powerful antidote to the forces of evil.

In the same manner and in a variety of ways, St. Anthony became associated with Legba, the Dahomean god of the crossroads, since both were imagined and pictured as tattered old men. John the Baptist, portrayed with a

shepherd's crook, was identified with Shango, the Yoruban god of thunder whose symbol is the ram. And St. Michael, pictured with a sword, called to mind Ogun, the Yoruban god of war. The identifications varied in different localities—in New Orleans, for example, Limba (Legba?) is still associated with St. Peter—but the over-all process was the same.

These parallels functioned as a kind of bridge to the New World over which West African music could be carried, modified, and preserved. And African rhythms survived more or less by accident. Here again, the Protestant religions of British colonies had no hierarchy of saints and, indeed, forbade any such pictures. The Baptist and Methodist denominations, which most actively proselytized for Negro members, strictly prohibited both dancing and drumming—the two outstanding characteristics of African religion—not so much as a safety precaution against revolts (the usual reason for prohibiting drumming in Catholic colonies) but as a matter of religious principle. So African music either disappeared or went underground.

Parenthetically, the West Africans had no inherent or 'instinctive' sense of rhythm which would have survived in any case. They came from a culture which happened to have fantastically complicated rhythms but only those rhythms survived which in one way or another were permitted to do so. A good part of the West African musical heritage, however, survived unconsciously—through attitudes, motions, habits, points of view, mannerisms, and gestures carried down from generation to generation without thought or plan.

A child might absorb some part of African rhythms, for example, simply by watching and listening to his mother sweep the floor. In her *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, Lydia Parrish prints parallel photographs of three native women in West Africa pounding corn in a pestle

and three American Negro women in Georgia pounding rice. The sticks and the pestles are very similar but the important point is that both groups appear to be singing rhythmically as they pound. In the Georgia photograph, a little child is standing close by in rapt attention, absorbing the entire performance.

What light do these general patterns, formed in connection with the development of the slave trade and the changed New World environment, throw on the origins of jazz? We are still in the process of filling out the patterns which helped and hindered the survival of African music in the New World, but we can already pin down the dominant tribal style that existed in certain areas. Further, we know that these musical characteristics tended to survive in Latin-Catholic colonies and to disappear or go underground in British-Protestant colonies.

This is not to say that jazz evolved in Latin-Catholic surroundings because of the greater prevalence of African music, or even that going underground in British-Protestant surroundings contributed indirectly to the evolution of jazz—although, as we shall see, there may be some truth in both hypotheses. It is enough to observe that the elements of West African music which contributed to the blend that became jazz were certainly present and active in the New World. In the following pages we shall examine a variety of musical blendings in various parts of the New World in an effort to reconstruct the pattern that led to jazz.

### 3 | The West Indies and the United States

Each island in the West Indies is a sort of musical test-tube in which West African and European music have been mixed in more or less known quantities, thus furnishing possible clues to what must have happened in the United States. No one island, of course, has exactly the same combination of ingredients, and the United States has a still different and perhaps more complicated mixture of its own. Although the results vary, the over-all pattern of blending is the same.

At one extreme is Dutch Guiana, located in the northern part of South America, where the Bush-Negroes live. It is jungle country and, from the first, many slaves escaped inland where they flourished. A wide sampling of the music of Dutch Guiana has been recorded by Herskovits and analyzed by Kolinski, who found: 'With the exception of a few songs, the music of the Bush-Negroes displays traits that are essentially African.'<sup>1</sup> In fact, since African music has been influenced by ours in recent times, Bush-Negro music, it has been suggested, is more African than African music today. Kolinski also discovered that the songs of the coastal Negroes, who lived in a predominantly European culture, were about 23 per cent African. Thus, in Dutch Guiana we find a pattern of survival ranging from a little less than one-quarter to almost total retention.

Haiti is a more complicated but more illuminating example. Haiti was supplied with slaves by French traders, among others, and the French planters preferred Dahomeans. Hence it is not surprising that although Courlander found traces of at least thirty-seven African tribes in Haiti, he found the dominant culture to be Dahomean.<sup>2</sup> Today Haiti is probably the most 'primitive' island this side of Africa. As Courlander says:<sup>3</sup>

On the plantations and off, the Negroes never forgot the drum rhythms of their own countries, nor their ancestors and deities. They never forgot how to make fine drums. And whether the drum was of a Congo pattern, or Ibo, or Arada, all men listened to it, and danced in the light of the smoking oil lamps.

The Arada tribe is Dahomean and its members are practitioners of *vodun*. (For twelve years, from 1847 to 1859, *vodun* was virtually the official religion of Haiti.) At the same time, just about everyone in Haiti is a member of the Catholic Church. *Vodun* and Catholicism have merged, for the Haitian peasant gladly adopts the Catholic religion to reinforce his African beliefs.

On a field trip to Haiti in 1953, I witnessed a *vodun* ceremony presided over by a young *houngan*, or priest, named Dr. Jean Dieudonné. He looked so much like the late saxophonist Charlie Parker that it made me uneasy. For three or more hours, the *hounsis*, or priestesses, danced and sang a regular response to the *houngan's* cries, while the drum trio pounded away hypnotically. In a back room was an oven-like altar. Within the oven was a tank of water containing a snake, sacred to Damballa, and on top of this altar was a second, smaller one, containing a blond baby doll of the Coney Island variety and a statuette of the Madonna, twin symbols of Ezulie, goddess of fertility and chastity.

About eleven o'clock the lid blew off. Drinking from a paper-wrapped bottle, the *houngan* sprayed some liquid out of his mouth in a fine mist and the *mambos*, or women dancers, became seized with religious hysteria, or 'possessed,' much like an epileptic fit. The rest of the group kept the 'possessed' ones from hurting themselves. I saw one young and stately priestess, who had earlier impressed me with the poise and dignity of her dancing, bumping across the dirt floor in time with the drums. The spirit of Damballa, the snake god, had entered her.

I shall never know how much of the performance was authentic. The drums, and the rhythms played upon them, were Dahomean. The whole ceremony was similar to, but decidedly more orderly than, some revival meetings—both white and Negro—that I have observed in the United States. This was probably because in Haiti they had a formal goal, namely, possession, and it was reached in a highly ritualized fashion. I noticed that several *mambos*, emerging from possession, simply sat down and fell into a peaceful sleep.

Secular African rhythms have survived in Haiti, too, in the *coumbite* (Dahomean: 'dokpwe'), or communal work-group. Their songs are similar to our own work songs. On the other hand, predominantly European mixtures, such as the *meringue* with its French folk melodies, also occur in Haiti. The Haitian *meringues* sometimes sound a little like our ragtime without the force and drive.

These parallels between Haitian and American music help to establish an over-all pattern. Both Haiti and New Orleans, for example, were Latin-colonial—French and Spanish—until the early 1800's. Africans from the same tribes arrived in both areas. In fact, many slaves came to New Orleans direct from Haiti during the revolution, brought there by fleeing French planters. The chief difference is that, from this time on, New Orleans but not Haiti

felt the influence of British Protestantism, American variety, and sudden prosperity.

In 1885, a correspondent of the New York *World*, watching the dancing of the Negroes in New Orleans' Congo Square, asked a colored lady what the dance was. 'C'est le Congo,' she replied.<sup>4</sup> The Congo, as such, is no longer danced in New Orleans, but it is still danced in Haiti, along with the Bamboula, the Juba, the Calinda, and the Coundjaille—dances that are mentioned frequently by early visitors to New Orleans. The Haitian versions, which have remained more or less untouched, are probably similar to the early New Orleans dances which have disappeared.

Another pattern for comparison occurs in Cuba.<sup>5</sup> The music varies from Yoruba rhythms to Spanish songs. This wide range reflects Cuba's historical background accurately. For many years a Spanish possession, into which Africans were smuggled as late as the 1880's, Cuba became a republic in 1902. Unlike Haiti, Cuba welcomed outside influences, in particular American capital, and has become prosperous more recently.

We are better acquainted with certain Cuban music because Cuba has its own Tin-Pan Alley, which in recent years has been closely linked with our own. The tango and its rhythms, which became the rage of New York City in 1914 over the protests of educators and clergymen, are a development of the Habanera (Havana). The word 'tango' is of African origin and the dance, according to Slonimsky, illustrates what the Africans in Cuba could do with an English country dance.

Of the native Cuban dances, the Habanera, Guajira, Punto, and Guaracha contain strong Spanish elements, while the Rhumba, Conga, Son Afro-Cubano, Mambo, and Cha-Cha are predominantly African. The chief difference, of course, is in the rhythm. And even the amount of rhythm in any one dance can vary. The rhumba, which is by far

the most popular outside of Cuba, is consistently diluted for Western ears and has become a fixture at fashionable American night clubs. Played by a real Afro-Cuban band, however, the true rhumba can develop into a rhythmic holocaust.

These dances and their rhythms show us only the surface of Cuban music. There is a lively religious group in Cuba known as Los Santos, or The Saints, which is quite similar to the following of Daddy Grace and Father Divine in the United States. The Saints, dressed in pure white, stage elaborate religious rituals which culminate in possession, much like our own revival meetings. But the musical instruments for such occasions consist of Yoruban drums, shaped like hour glasses, and the drumming and singing are in the Yoruban style.

Another and more important brand of West African music is sung, danced, and played by secret societies, or *cabildos*, in Cuba.<sup>6</sup> The chief cults are the Arara from Dahomey (Haitian 'Arada,' the practitioners of *vodun*), the Kimbisa from the Congo, the Lucumi from the Slave Coast, and the Abakwa from the region of the Niger River. Each has its own type of West African instrument, rhythm, and dialect. The Abakwa, members of which are slightly known as 'Nanigos,' is the most important and includes members of other cults and even a few whites.

These secret societies actually continue organizations that existed in Africa. They have been outlawed, whenever the political situation needed a scapegoat, but on the other hand they are also asked to furnish the rhythmic propulsion for the annual Mardi Gras. The Cuban dancer, drummer, and composer, Chano Pozo, was a member of the Abakwa and became the hit of Mardi Gras. Pozo had a direct impact on jazz when he joined the Dizzy Gillespie band in 1947.

In a search for Pozo's antecedents I was taken to the Cayo Hueso, or slum district, of Havana. I met his grandmother

in a narrow, crowded alley where dozens of families live outdoors all the year round. As the only white man and in the company of a brown-skinned guide, I met with silent hostility. My guide actually did not dare to ask the pipe-smoking old lady if she was born in Africa. Later, I met Pozo's father, a shoeshine 'boy,' and learned that the son was two generations from Africa. Puzzled tears came to the father's eyes as he asked me why his oldest and last son had been murdered in Harlem.

It was not difficult to find drummers in Cuba. In a bare tenement room I recorded the songs and rhythms of the various secret societies. The drummers knew most of them, but their favorites were Yoruban and derived from the Lucumi cult. The most impressive number was dedicated to Chango, the Yoruban thunder god, known as Shango in Trinidad. Another, in praise of 'Legua,' was similar to the rhythms of the Dahomean Legba, the guardian of the cross-roads in Haiti.

What patterns occur in Cuba? Like Haiti, Cuba duplicates the Latin-Catholic background of New Orleans up to 1803. Unlike Haiti, Cuba has become relatively prosperous in recent years. Neither Haiti nor Cuba, however, felt the influence of British Protestantism until very recently. No jazz evolved in Cuba, and yet Cuban popular music and the dances associated with it have spread over the Western world. The mixture of Spanish and African music, in varying amounts, seems to be a highly palatable product.

Perhaps a more significant pattern for comparison occurs in Trinidad, for here we find the additional influence of British Protestantism.<sup>7</sup> Originally Spanish, Trinidad admitted Catholic colonists—mostly French—from 1783 to 1797, when it became a British colony and English planters moved in. Thus, the aristocracy of the island still consists of Spanish, French, and British families, in that order. In our time, laborers have been imported from the Orient—Chinese and

East Indians—and with the discovery of oil, Trinidad has prospered.

The music of Trinidad runs the gamut from predominantly European to essentially West African. The calypso, Trinidad's best-known creation, can be heard in the United States in a diluted version in such popular hits as 'Rum and Coca-Cola,' or in Trinidad in a more rhythmic version in a West African style. It is derived, in part, from the biting West African songs of ridicule and is still used as a political weapon when more direct means would bring reprisal. It also contains, according to some theorists, the melody and harmony of French folk songs, a dialect of several languages, and African rhythms. Its influence is now felt throughout the West Indies.

Like Haiti and Cuba, nevertheless, Trinidad has its African cult, or secret society, music. Much of this is Yoruban and dedicated to Shango, the god of thunder. The instruments have changed, however, for when drums were banned Trinidad Negroes adopted tambos—bamboo sticks tapped on the ground one at a time. When tambos were banned—with some reason, for they made formidable weapons—Trinidadians invented the steel band. The vogue of the steel band has invaded many other islands in the West Indies, and has even reached New York. (After hearing a steel band at the Jazz Roundtable at Music Inn, composer Henry Cowell scored part of a new symphony for steel drums.) Just one type of instrument is used: a drum made from the top of a huge oil barrel, heated and hammered until it responds with a variety of notes when struck in certain spots. Trinidad drummers march a hundred strong during a festival, playing the latest pop tune amidst a boiler factory of sound.

The special significance of Trinidad's background, however, lies in the rather early existence of Protestantism. When England took over in 1797, Catholicism and African

fetish were already partly fused. The northern religion did not make much headway except with a small group of converts to the Baptist faith in Toco, a village in the northeastern part of the island. They are called Shouters with some accuracy, for they generated enough excitement and noise to be officially banned. Unlike The Saints in Cuba, the Trinidad Shouters banned dancing and drumming, according to the Baptist rules. Hand-clapping and foot-stamping evolved to take the place of the drums, and the ceremonies became famous for their revivalist power and frenzy. Complaints poured in for a radius of several miles whenever the Shouters held a meeting. Here is a new pattern: Protestantism superimposed upon a mixture of African and Catholic ritual, leading to revival music such as is found in the United States.

A recording of the Shouters, made by Herskovits, furnishes an amazing parallel. The tune is 'Jesus Lover of My Soul,' a standard hymn from the Moody and Sankey hymnbook. Beginning in a very stolid manner, the Shouters intone the tune 'as written.' Gradually, rhythms are introduced; one singer starts to imitate a drum, another begins to clap on the off-beat, a third introduces a falsetto cry. Soon the call-and-response pattern dominates the performance, which builds into a rhythmic jamboree of such intensity that it might well produce religious possession.<sup>8</sup>

The recording is a capsule demonstration of the Africanization of a British hymn. In the space of four minutes, the European elements are transformed into African elements. Thus, when people of African descent perform European hymns, according to the prohibitions of Protestant religion, the music seems to bear a strong resemblance to one of the precursors of jazz in the United States—the shouting spiritual. Add European instruments and you have something very near to early jazz.

Another pattern for comparison occurs in the Bahamas,

which had little or no Latin-Catholic influence. The outstanding fact about the Bahamas is their poverty, relieved in recent years by the tourist business. Their contact with the United States has been close for a century and a half. Bimini was a busy port during Prohibition and, in 1954, I found that the latest, rhythm-and-blues hits from Harlem were played on juke boxes in the Negro section of Nassau. The keen admiration for the United States is symbolized by the fact that the so-called 'natives' prefer a Buick to a Rolls-Royce. Social distinctions are hard and fast, nevertheless, for the Bahamas are a typical British colony.

The music of the Bahamas is very similar to the music of the United States.<sup>9</sup> There are, however, subtle differences. The calypso influence is stronger but its current exponent, Blind Blake, acknowledges the early influence of Bessie Smith. Spirituals called 'ant'hems' are still sung in the old American style, as well as the latest gospel songs. Except for the addition of a formidable Salvation Army band accompaniment, the services of the Sanctified Church are similar to those held in the United States, where the denomination originated.

And yet drumming on native drums in the African manner still flourishes (Folkways LP 440), although all the jazz in the Bahamas came from the United States. Why? Perhaps because there was no Latin-Catholic background to assist in a blending. Perhaps because the United States emerged from colonial status at an early date. This meant social upheaval which broke down colonial attitudes, sharpened awareness of Negro-white relationships, and permitted the Negro to integrate himself more completely with the dominant culture. In the stable British colonial relationships of the Bahamas, unchanged because of one ruling class, poverty, and a lack of industrial development, class distinctions insulated Negro from white. African drumming may have survived simply by default, but later, it became an

asset to festivals and the tourist trade, and was encouraged.

Martinique, on the other hand, was colonized by the French in 1635 and has remained a French colony ever since. The music of the island, much like that of Haiti, runs the gamut from West African cult music to French folk songs. Unlike Haiti, Martinique remained a French colonial possession, and a musical blending resulted that is very close to New Orleans Creole music, even to the clarinet and trombone style and instrumentation. Music from the Select Tango dance-hall in Fort de France documents the Bechet-like clarinet, the Ory-like trombone, and the raggy piano, playing waltzes, galops, and mazurkas with a kind of 'jazzy' rhythm (Dial LP 402). This Martinique music is slightly less martial, more complex rhythmically, and a little lighter than the Creole music of New Orleans, which is a demonstrable component of jazz.

What conclusions can we draw from the known patterns in Dutch Guiana, Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad, the Bahamas, and Martinique? West African religious music such as *vodun* survived best of all, because it was highly formalized and could mix with elements of Christianity, especially Catholicism. Where Protestantism existed, the blending took the direction of shouting revival music. Above all, a Latin-Catholic environment appears to have assisted the survival of African qualities.

In general, the cities and especially New Orleans (but cf. also Mobile and Charleston) seem to have evolved a blend of march music and satirical love song similar—even in instrumentation—to the Afro-French music of Martinique. On the other hand, the countryside, dominated by Protestant religions in the United States, seems to have evolved the style of the preacher and shouting congregation as in Toco, Trinidad. And then, of course, both traditions began to mix and blend in the southern United States in an endless variety of ways.

Living in New Orleans in 1880, Lafcadio Hearn wrote: 'the melancholy, quavering beauty and weirdness of the Negro chant are lightened by the French influence, or subdued and deepened by the Spanish.'<sup>10</sup> The contrasting music of Cuba and Martinique seems to bear out this insight—the former blending Spanish and the latter French music with West African. Again, prosperity certainly hastened the development and extended the influence of the merging wherever it occurred. Could it be that the Latin-Catholic background of New Orleans gave the West African musical heritage a head start in the blending of European and African musics, which was later slowed down and forced underground by the gradual advent of Protestantism after the Louisiana Purchase? Then, in turn, could this double process of speed-up and slow-down have forced a more radical integration, creating a new combination and a new music? In the following pages, we shall investigate this hypothesis.

**PART TWO : NEW ORLEANS**

---



## 4

## The New Orleans Background

New Orleans has a special place in the story of jazz. A Latin-Catholic possession for eighty-two years, it became part of a predominantly British-Protestant country after the Louisiana Purchase. At times, the patterns of music in New Orleans resembled those of different islands in the West Indies. The combination and the timing in the blend of West African music with European was unique, however, and led to the birth of a new music. For the New Orleans environment was decidedly different from that of the rest of the United States.

For its first forty-six years New Orleans was a French possession and customs were established that have endured to this day. The city was ceded by France to Spain in 1764, and the Spanish governed it for the next thirty-six years; New Orleans nevertheless remained fundamentally French in thought and feeling.<sup>1</sup> At this stage, it resembled the French West Indies, with music that probably was similar to Martinique's or Haiti's today. The big change, political and economic, came at the turn of the century. In 1800, Napoleon forced Spain to return the territory to France, and for three years no one in New Orleans was quite sure whether the city belonged to France or Spain. Then, in 1803, Napoleon sold the territory to the United States.

The prosperity that resulted in the city of New Orleans

and which played its part in shaping New Orleans music was due in part to the Western migration of Americans to the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Between the years 1776 and 1820, the number of settlers west of the Allegheny Mountains increased from 12,000 to 2,000,000. They needed supplies, and the cheapest way to transport the supplies to them was by riverboat from New Orleans. On the other hand, flatboats floated raw materials down from the newly settled lands to the port city. In 1803, the tonnage of ships using the port increased 50 per cent. The population of the city at this time was approximately 10,000—half white and half Negro. With the opening of the Louisiana Territory to Americans, a great influx of people into New Orleans began. The population doubled in seven years. The demand for entertainment—musical and otherwise—increased accordingly. And at the same time the invasion of British-Protestant culture commenced. New Orleans became a boom town and one of the chief cities of the New World.

The Negroes, of course, participated in the development of the city and its music. From what part of West Africa did they come and what elements of their customs survived? We may never know the whole story, but we do have several clues. Many came from the West Indies. The editors of *Gumbo Ya-Ya* state that 500 slaves from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and San Domingo (part of which later became Haiti) were imported into Louisiana in 1776, and 3,000 more the following year.<sup>2</sup> These islands were French possessions at the time, and the slaves were mainly Yorubas and Dahomeans, worshippers of *vodun*. From 1809 to 1810, more than 3,000 arrived from San Domingo, by way of Cuba, their French masters having fled the Haitian revolution.

Many more had come directly from West Africa. Not long after the Civil War, Africans from a variety of tribes could be identified in New Orleans. An essay by G. W. Cable,

who lived in New Orleans before and after the Civil War, gives us the observations of an acute eyewitness:<sup>3</sup>

See them . . . tall, well-knit Senegalese from Cape Verde, black as ebony, with intelligent, kindly eyes and long, straight, shapely noses; Mandingo, from the Gambia River, lighter of color, of cruder form, and a cunning that shows in the countenance; whose enslavement seems specially a shame, their nation the 'merchants of Africa,' dwelling in towns, industrious, thrifty, skilled in commerce and husbandry, and expert in the working of metals, even to silver and gold; and Foulahs, playfully miscalled 'Poulards,'—fat chickens—of goodly stature, and with a perceptible rose tint in the cheeks; and Sosos, famous warriors, dexterous with the African targe; and in contrast to these, with small ears, thick eyebrows, bright eyes, flat, upturned noses, shining skin, wide mouths and white teeth, the Negroes of Guinea, true and unmixed, from the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast, and the Cape of Palms—not from the Grain Coast; the English had that trade. See them come! Po-poies, Cotocolies, Fidas, Socoes, Agwas, short, copper-colored Mines—what havoc the slavers did make—and from interior Africa others equally proud and warlike: fierce Nagoes and Fonds; tawny Awassas; Iboes, so light colored that one could not tell them from mulattoes but for their national tattooing; and the half-civilized and quick-witted but ferocious Arada, the original Voudou worshipper. And how many more! For here come, also, men and women from all the great Congo coast—Angola, Malimbe, Ambrice, etc. . . . the most numerous sort of negro in the colonies, the Congoes and Franc-Congoes, and though serpent worshippers, yet the gentlest and kindliest natures that came from Africa.

Some eighteen tribal names and localities, many of which are now known by other names, are listed here.

Cable has done a pretty systematic job in listing African tribes from Dakar to the Congo. The Mandingo, Senegalese, Foulahs, and Sosos came from northwest Africa around and below Dakar. He explicitly excludes the Grain Coast

(now Sierra Leone and Liberia). The Agwas and, perhaps, the Socoës came from the Ivory and Gold Coasts, in and near Ashanti territory. The Popes, Fidas, Cotocolies, and Aradas came from in and around Dahomey. The Nagoes, Fonds, Awassas, and Iboes came from Nigeria, home of the Yorubas, and adjoining lands. And the Angolas, Malimbés, and Ambrices came from the Congo.

The emphasis here is upon the four areas that Herskovits specifies: Senegal, the Guinea coast, the Niger delta, and the Congo. The Ashantis (preferred by the British) are not well represented, while the Congo tribes, which arrived late, are referred to as the most numerous. Four tribes each from the vicinity of Nigeria and Dahomey are specified, however, which bears out the preferences of French and Spanish planters. Further, Cable mentions the Slave Coast, which included Dahomey, and singles out for comment 'the half-civilized and quick-witted but ferocious Arada, the original Voudou worshipper,' a Dahomean tribesman.

Since *vodun* (or voodoo or hoodoo) has survived in the United States to this day, the mention of the Arada tribe—as we have discovered—is significant. Speaking of the parallel example of Haiti, Courlander says, 'The Iboes learned the dances of the Congos, the Arada of the Senegalese. And yet, one culture came to dominate the whole, that of the Dahomeans.'

For the Dahomean religion of *vodun* gave its name and served as a focal point for a constellation of similar rituals from a variety of West African tribes. The combination was both powerful and enduring, and it surfaced later in Congo Square. Herskovits, referring to Cable's novel, *The Grandissimes*, a story of (white) Creole life in ante-bellum New Orleans, carries the point a step further:<sup>4</sup>

The names of several deities which figure in the *vodun* cults of Haiti and Dahomey are mentioned in Cable's novel. Papa Lébat [Legba] . . . Danny [Damballa] . . . Agoussou . . . M.

Assouquer . . . the familiar pouring of a libation . . . the concept of the *zombi* as spirit . . . the magic charm embodied in the term *ouangan* . . . these are familiar aspects of Haitian terminology and important elements in Haitian no less than West African life.

In fact, Cable's stories of the French aristocrats in New Orleans leave the impression that these people spent a good part of each day casting spells or counter-spells on one another according to the Dahomean or *vodun* rituals they had absorbed from the Africans.

The environment in which the African found himself in New Orleans was diverse and changing. Thomas Ashe, who visited the city in 1806, comments on the economic structure in terms of national origin:<sup>5</sup>

The trade of the city is conducted, for the most part, by four classes of men. Virginians and Kentuckians reign over the brokerage and commission business; the Scotch and Irish absorb all the respectable commerce of exportation and importation; the French keep magazines and stores; and the Spaniards do all the small retail trade of grocer's shops, cabants, and the lowest order of drinking houses. People of colour, and free negroes, also keep inferior shops, and sell goods and fruits.

The French and Spanish aristocrats of Latin-Catholic days, it seems, were ill-equipped to compete with the invasion of Yankee traders which followed the Louisiana Purchase, and British-Protestant customs were beginning to make themselves felt.

Yet New Orleans remained—and remains to this day—a preponderantly Latin-Catholic town, a factor which aided the survival of African music. As late as 1846, when geologist Charles Lyell visited the city, he was told that 'in spite of the increase of Protestants . . . there had been quite as much "flour and fun"' at Mardi Gras.<sup>6</sup> And the music that the African heard in New Orleans was rather congenial as

contrasted to the music he might have heard in the rest of the United States. In addition, Africans from the French West Indies, who had already absorbed something of European music, continued to arrive and a further blending was under way.

Again, the range of music with which people of varying degrees of African descent became familiar was unique. On the one hand, the Creoles of Color, who combined Spanish, French, and African ancestry, attained considerable social status for a while and absorbed much of the best European music. They sent their children to Paris to be educated and they had their own opera in New Orleans with a conductor celebrated in Europe. After the Civil War and with the arrival of Northern prejudice, their downfall was slow but complete. They were forced to join their darker brothers and—as we shall see—they had much to contribute, perhaps most clearly by way of technique, to the birth of jazz.

On the other hand, the slaves on the large plantations in the vicinity of New Orleans heard little or no European music. Left pretty much to themselves, these field hands were able to retain much of their musical heritage and the plantations became a reservoir of African music. Between these two extremes, many slaves and free men of color were scattered through the city—a legal measure to discourage rebellion which incidentally reduced segregation. This tendency to make social distinctions along economic rather than racial lines, which later lost its force, also helped to accelerate a blending of musics.

The changing factors that set New Orleans apart from the rest of the United States made for a powerful survival of West African music and an early blending of this music with European music. West African music—and we can pinpoint the dominant tribe and document the high intensity of *vodun* ritual—had a unique measure of survival because of the Latin-Catholic environment. The blending of West

African and European music had a pronounced head start because of the wide range of assimilation by people of color amidst unusual business prosperity. For during its early years, New Orleans was a musical melting pot *par excellence* with a large component of West African ingredients simmering to a boil over the forced draft of a financial boom.

## 5

## The Transition to Jazz

How did the West African influence survive in New Orleans and blend with European music? Two steps in the process seem to be clear: private *vodun* ceremonies and public performances in Congo Square. The first preserved African music—and especially rhythm—in the midst of its rituals; and the second forced the same music—without as much of the ritual—out into the open where it could easily influence and be influenced by European music.

The Black Code of 1724 forbade all forms of worship except Catholicism. The prevalence of *vodun* among the slaves, however, presented a continual problem. In 1782, Governor Galvez banned the admission of Negroes from Martinique because they practiced voodoo and would 'make the lives of the citizens unsafe.'<sup>1</sup> Others were sent back in 1792. As late as 1803, the Municipal Council banned a shipload of Santo Domingo slaves on the same grounds. *Vodun* was spreading even among the whites.

After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the United States lifted all restrictions and immigration boomed. So did *vodun*. Tallant remarks that the Sunday dances of the slaves in Congo Square, legalized by the Municipal Council in 1817, were an attempt 'of the city authorities to combat Voodooism.'<sup>2</sup> They were supposed to act as a kind of safety valve to keep the slaves contented. The dances also became

a remunerative tourist attraction at which *vodun* music happened to be played.

Trustworthy early accounts of *vodun* ceremonies are rare. They are also exaggerated. J. W. Buel tells the story of a friend who saw a *vodun* ceremony in 1825, led by the first of the voodoo queens, Sanite Dede:<sup>3</sup>

. . . I recognized an old negro by the name of Zozo, well-known in New Orleans as a vender of palmetto and sassafras roots . . . He was astride of a cylinder made of thin cypress staves hooped with brass and headed by a sheepskin. With two sticks he droned away a monotonous ra-ta-ta, ra-ta-ta-ta, while on his left sat a negro on a low stool, who with two sheep shank bones, and a negress with the leg-bones of a buzzard or turkey, beat an accompaniment on the sides of the cylinder . . . Some two feet from these arch-musicians squatted a young negro vigorously twirling a long calabash.

These instruments and the style of drumming are still used in the West Indies for the Juba and Bamboula dances. And the 'ra-ta-ta, ra-ta-ta-ta' is a good approximation of one of the rhythms I heard at *vodun* ceremonies in Haiti.

A later account from the *New Orleans Times* (21 March 1869) describes a public ceremony at Lake Ponchartrain. Marie Laveau, the most famous of all voodoo queens, presided. The presence of a reporter shows her belief in the value of publicity, as well as indicating that elements of *vodun* were becoming an accepted part of New Orleans life. According to this report,<sup>4</sup>

. . . an elderly turbaned female dressed in yellow and red, ascended a sort of dais and chanted a wild sort of fetish song, to which the others kept up an accompaniment with their voices and with a drum-like beat of their hands and feet. At the same time they commenced to move in a circle, while gradually increasing the time.

The drum-like rhythms of the clapping and stamping, the accelerated tempo, the circle dance, and the call-and-response pattern are essentially West African.

A more trustworthy account was written by Charles Dudley Warner in the 'eighties. (It was Warner who collaborated with Mark Twain on *The Gilded Age*.) This illegal affair took place on the second floor of a house near Congo Square. It began with a recitation of the Apostles' Creed, followed by prayers to the Virgin Mary, whose statue stood upon an altar crowded with *vodun* fetishes. Then the singing began:<sup>5</sup>

The chant grew, the single line was enunciated in stronger pulsations, and other voices joined in the wild refrain,

'Danse Calinda, boudoum, boudoum!  
Danse Calinda, boudoum, boudoum!'

Bodies swayed, the hands kept time in soft patpatting, and the feet in muffled accentuation.

As the singing became wilder, the 'witch doctor' ignited some brandy and performed a dance with a flaming dish.

The rhythm switched during the dance and a new and more powerful rhythm began:

... the chant had been changed for the wild *canga*, more rapid in movement than the *chanson Africaine*:<sup>6</sup>

Eh! Eh! Bomba, hen! hen!  
Canga bafio, té  
Canga moune dé lé  
Canga do ki la  
Canga li

... During his dancing and whirling he frequently filled his mouth with liquid, and discharged it in a spray . . . Having extinguished the candles of the supplicants, he scooped the liquid from the bowl, flaming or not as it might seem, and with his hands vigorously scrubbed their faces and heads . . . While the victim was still sputtering and choking he seized

him by the right hand, lifted him up, spun him round a half dozen times, and then sent him whirling.

Here, the ritual details—the changing of rhythm, the spraying of spirits, the spinning of devotees, as well as the igniting of the brandy—are identical with the details of *vodun* ceremonies. Mr. Warner could hardly have invented the real thing. (The words, in an African-Creole dialect, are quite another matter—originally authentic perhaps, they had been reprinted more or less intact by a series of authors over the preceding hundred years.)

A mixture of African gods and Catholic saints took place in New Orleans, too. For example, Legba is the Dahomean god of the crossroads, of luck and fertility, and *vodun* ceremonies in West Africa usually begin with an invocation to him. In New Orleans, Legba was identified with St. Peter, perhaps because St. Peter is represented as carrying keys, which suggest the omniscient powers of Legba. Thus, the sanctity of St. Peter helped to preserve the rituals and rhythms connected with Legba.

For example, recalling stories of Marie Laveau, the late Josephine Green told interviewers:<sup>6</sup>

It was back before the war what they had here wit' the Northerners. My ma heard a noise on Frenchman street where she lived at and she start to go outside. Her pa say, 'Where you goin'? Stay in the house!' She say, 'Marie Laveau is comin' and I gotta see her.' She went outside and here come Marie Laveau wit' a big crowd of people followin' her. My ma say that woman used to strut like she owned the city, and she was tall and good-lookin' and wore her hair hangin' down her back. She looked just like a Indian or one of them Gypsy ladies. She wore big full skirts and lots of jewelry hangin' all over her. All the people wit' her was hollerin' and scream'in', 'We is goin' to see Papa Limba! We is goin' to see Papa Limba!' My grandpa go runnin' after my ma then, yellin' at her, 'You come on in here, Eunice! Don't you know Papa

Limba is the devil? But after that my ma find out Papa Limba means St. Peter, and her pa was jest foolin' her.

Stories about *vodun* in New Orleans are full of garbled references to Legba. Old-timer Alexander Augustin remarked that 'oldtime Voodoos always talked about Papa La Bas,' and another informant named Mary Ellis remembered that 'Marie Laveau used to call St. Peter somethin' like "Laba."'

The Bible itself became a great 'conjur' book, along with a text ascribed to Albertus Magnus which was banned in Haiti and which is available in Harlem bookstores today. For *vodun* is still with us. Anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston, who joined several New Orleans cults in the 'twenties, declares:<sup>8</sup>

New Orleans is now and has ever been the hoodoo capital of America. Great names in rites that vie with those of Hayti in deeds that keep alive the powers of Africa. Hoodoo, or Voodoo, as pronounced by the whites, is burning with a flame in America, with all the intensity of a suppressed religion. It has its thousands of secret adherents.

She participated in a ceremony which was intended to bring death to its victim. No white people were present, and the music consisted of chanting, clapping, and stamping. 'The heel-patting was a perfect drum rhythm,' while 'the hand-clapping had various stimulating breaks,' and the 'fury of the rhythm' kept the dancers going until they became possessed.

As time went on, elements of *vodun* came to the surface under various guises. Even today, voodoo drugstores in New Orleans are doing a profitable business in *gris-gris* or magic charms. Among the voodoo paraphernalia for sale are pictures of Catholic saints, and in his *Voodoo in New Orleans*, Robert Tallant states:<sup>9</sup>

To certain Roman Catholic saints particular Voodoo power has been attributed: St. Michael is thought best able to aid in conquering enemies; St. Anthony de Padua is invoked for 'luck'; St. Mary Magdalene is popular with women who are in love; St. Joseph (holding the Infant Jesus) is used to get a job. Many Voodoos believe a picture of the Virgin Mary in their homes will prevent illness, and that one of St. Peter (with the Key to Heaven) will bring great and speedy success in financial matters (without the Key to Heaven, St. Peter is still reliable in helping in the achievement of minor successes; the *power* of the picture is less, however). Pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are believed to have the ability to cure organic diseases.

'Lodestones,' which are like Haitian loa or fetishes, are also considered powerful charms. More recently, 'John the Conqueror'—good for both love and gambling—is highly popular. (It is manufactured in Chicago.)

Another facet of *vodun* has come to the surface as 'spiritualism.' The 16 May 1953 edition of the *Amsterdam News* of New York, for example, contains twenty-nine advertisements of spiritualists. One mentions Africa as his place of origin and nine name New Orleans. Here is a sample:

#### QUICK ACTION

Troubled, unlucky, need money? Regardless of what your troubles are I can help any human on earth. Do something about it. 25 years experience searching in Kentucky, South Carolina, Virginia, Birmingham, New Orleans. Learn the secret from old folks in these states who know how to do things. My method brings amazingly quick results. Work guaranteed. A word from three of the thousands of people that I have helped. A.W., New York: I was blessed \$500.00 R.P.: I have a new 1953 Mercury. D.M., New York: I never in all my life knew anyone who has helped me as much as you have. Bishop Moody, 3420 Park Ave., Bronx. Hours 2 to 8 P.M. Phone MO. 5-4487.

This is the 'legitimate' side of a big industry.

The famous Ferdinand 'Jelly Roll' Morton was a devout believer. Although removed from the strongest influences by his Creole ancestry, Morton was brought up by his aunt, Eulalie Echo, whom he quite casually calls a 'voodoo witch.' As a youth, he was cured of some illness by voodoo. Later on, during a stay in New York, he burned up a dozen or so new suits at the suggestion of a 'voodoo doctor.' 'I spent thousands of dollars,' says Morton in the book by Alan Lomax, 'trying to get this spell taken off me.' Similarly when questioned about 'voodoo' in his interview with Larry Gara, Baby Dodds replied, 'That's all bosh. Sure I heard of it . . . Practically all people from New Orleans take that seriously. Very much yet.' The attitude of several modern jazzmen, born and bred in the South, is striking: 'This hoodoo jive is nowhere,' they say, 'but man, watch out!'

Other evidences of the survival of *vodun* in our culture keep popping up. Courlander noted *vodun* phrases in a Creole song recorded by John and Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress. Nobody had noticed it. References to 'goofe dust' and other fetishes are preserved in many recorded blues from Cripple Clarence Lofton to Willie Mabon and blues singer Bo Diddley. In 1953, Mr. Anthony Schwartz recorded *vodun* drumming and chanting in New York City.

These scattered examples probably represent the small part of the *vodun* iceberg that shows above water. Secret and illegal, *vodun* preserves elements of African ritual. Among other things, it is a reservoir of rhythm in our culture. In the early days, its greatest influence was felt among the less-educated and darker-skinned Negroes of uptown New Orleans. It is probably no accident that, when jazz began, it came from that part of town.

Public performances by Negroes in an empty lot known as Congo Square occurred off and on from 1817 to 1885.

These brought the sound and a little of the ritual of *vodun* out into the open—speeding up the blending of African with European music. In *The French Quarter*, Herbert Asbury describes the early days:<sup>10</sup>

At a signal from a police official, the slaves were summoned to the center of the square 'by the prolonged rattling of two huge beef bones upon the head of a cask, out of which had been fashioned a sort of drum or tambourine called the bamboula . . . The favorite dances of the slaves were the Calinda, a variation of which was also used in the Voodoo ceremonies, and the Dance of the Bamboula, both of which were primarily based on the primitive dances of the African jungle . . . the entire square was an almost solid mass of black bodies stamping and swaying to the rhythmic beat of the bones on the cask, the frenzied chanting of the women, and the clanging of pieces of metal which dangled from the ankles of the men.

The Calinda dance is connected with zombiism in Haiti; the Bamboula dance, named perhaps after the material of the drum, is an ancient dance once found in Martinique, Haiti, and the Virgin Islands. Both the instruments and music used in these dances are clearly West African.

An architect named Benjamin Henry Latrobe visited Congo Square in 1819 and described the instruments that he saw:<sup>11</sup>

The music consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man sat astride of a cylindrical drum about a foot in diameter, & beat it with incredible quickness with the edge of his hand & fingers. The other drum was an open staved thing held between the knees & beaten in the same manner . . . The most curious instrument, however, was a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. On the top of the finger board was the rude figure of a man in a sitting posture, & two pegs behind him to which the strings were fastened. The body was a calabash . . . One, which

from the color of the wood seemed new, consisted of a block cut into something of the form of a cricket bat with a long & deep mortice down the center . . . being beaten lustily on the side by a short stick. In the same orchestra was a square drum, looking like a stool . . . also a calabash with a round hole in it, the hole studded with brass nails, which was beaten by a woman with two short sticks.

These instruments are found in West Africa, but they may occur in more than one area. Dr. Curt Sachs writes that 'the elaborately carved long-neck lute . . . hints at the Congo, and so does the hobby-horse drum.' Harold Courlander has seen instruments like the 'cricket bat' in Cuba and suspects Yoruban origin. He adds that the square drum is found in Jamaica, and may be Ashanti. Professor Alan P. Merriam, on the other hand, ran across a reference to square drums 'among the Ijaw of South East Nigeria,' while Professor Lorenzo D. Turner of Roosevelt University says that all these instruments can be found among the Hausa or the Yoruba tribes of Nigeria.

By 1886, when G. W. Cable wrote about Congo Square, important changes were taking place:<sup>12</sup>

The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and having a sheep or goat skin stretched across the other. One was large, the other much smaller. The tight skin heads were not held up to be struck; the drums were laid along on the turf and the drummers bestrode them, and beat them on the head madly with fingers, fists, and feet, with slow vehemence on the great drum, and fiercely and rapidly on the small one. Sometimes an extra performer sat on the ground behind the larger drum, at its open end, and 'beat upon the wooden sides of it with two sticks.'

So far, this description of instruments and techniques could apply equally to West Africa or the West Indies.

The fact that the drums were 'laid along on the turf' and also beaten with two sticks indicates a close resem-

blance to the Juba or Martinique dance still current in Haiti where, according to Courlander, 'the Haitians . . . say it was one of the first African dances in the New World.' (I have witnessed the dance in Haiti, but the drummer damped the head of the drum with his heel rather than kicking it, as Cable relates.) Early accounts of New Orleans mention the Juba, and the term became a commonplace in minstrelsy.

Cable's description continues:

One important instrument was a gourd partly filled with pebbles or grains of corn, flourished violently at the end of a stout staff with one hand and beaten upon the palm of the other. Other performers rang triangles, and others twanged from jew's harps an astonishing amount of sound. Another instrument was the jawbone of some ox, horse, or mule, and a key rattled rhythmically along its weather-beaten teeth. At times, the drums were reinforced by one or more empty barrels or casks beaten on the head with the shankbones of cattle.

The typically African instruments, such as drums, gourd rattles, and scrapers, contrast here with the European jew's harp and triangle. A blending of instruments had begun.

The next instrument that Cable describes is rather unusual and certainly not European:

. . . the Marimba brett, a union of reed and string principles. A single strand of wire ran lengthwise of a bit of wooden board, sometimes a shallow box of thin wood, some eight inches long by four or five in width, across which, under the wire, were several joints of reed about a quarter of an inch in diameter and of graduated lengths. The performer, sitting cross-legged, held the board in both hands and plucked the ends of the reeds with his thumb-nails.

The 'marimba brett' is a descendant of the African 'thumb piano,' known throughout West Africa and common in the

jungle belt. It still exists in Haiti, where it is called the 'malimba.'

The climax of Cable's description gives us further clues concerning the musical blending that has taken place:

But the grand instrument . . . was the banjo. It had but four strings, not six . . . for the true African dance, a dance not so much of legs and feet as of the upper half of the body . . . there was wanted the dark inspiration of African drums and the banjo's thrump and strum.

And then there was that long-drawn cry of tremendous volume, richness, and resound, to which no instrument within their reach could make the faintest approach:

*'Eh! pou' la belle Layotte  
ma mourri 'nocent  
Qui 'nocent ma mourri!'*

all the instruments silent while it rises and swells with mighty energy and dies away distinctly, 'Yea-a-a-a-a-a!'—Then the crash of savage drums, horns, and rattles. To all this there was sometimes added a Pan's pipe of but three reeds . . . called by English-speaking negroes 'the quills.'

Quite possibly the banjo came from Africa. Writing about the Negroes in 1781-2, Thomas Jefferson observed: 'The instrument proper to them is the banjor, which they brought hither from Africa.'<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the Pan's pipes or quills (New Orleans drummer Baby Dodds said his father could make and play them) trace back to antiquity.

The most notable fact, however, is that the slaves are apparently singing a French-Creole tune in the French-Creole patois. And the melody is sung in the call-and-response pattern. A few European instruments and a European melody—no doubt modified—exist in the middle of this predominantly African performance. The blending of European and West African music is well under way, therefore, and the transition to jazz has begun.

## 6

## Jazz Begins

If something of the West African musical influence survived secretly in *vodun* and surfaced at Congo Square, how then did it contribute to the birth of jazz? Two factors aided this evolution: the tremendous popularity of the military band and the gradual adoption of European instruments. Beneath it all, of course, was the powerful and constant desire of the American Negro to make his mark, to belong, to participate effectively in a predominantly white culture. And music was one of the few avenues to fame and fortune.

The popularity of the military band reached its peak in the France of Napoleon. Parades and concerts soon became one of America's favorite outdoor sports. The Negroes had their bands, too. Writing about his trip to the South in 1853, F. L. Olmsted says 'in all of the Southern cities, there are music bands, composed of negroes, often of great excellence. The military parades are usually accompanied by a Negro brass band.'<sup>19</sup> Olmsted's standards of excellence are European and he is speaking here of European march music, played by the Negro freedman or house-slave. The field-slave working on the plantation had no such opportunity until after the Civil War. When the opportunity arrived, however, he brought less diluted West African influences with him and it made a decided difference.

As a former colony, New Orleans followed the French fashion in military bands closely and became justly famous for them. (Much later, in 1891, according to clarinetist Ed Hall, whose father was a member, the Onward Brass Band, composed of Negroes from New Orleans, won contests in New York.) Bands were employed on almost all occasions—parades, picnics, concerts, riverboat excursions, dances, funerals—and they were a sure-fire attraction. In 1871, no fewer than thirteen Negro organizations in New Orleans were represented by their own bands at the funeral ceremonies for President Garfield.<sup>2</sup>

What is the explanation for the pre-eminence and frequency of Negro bands in New Orleans? In addition to the close ties with France and the general popularity of brass bands, New Orleans had a special kind of organization to give them employment and an unusual tradition that welcomed their presence on a wide range of occasions. This combination helped to produce the first bands that began to swing.

The special kind of organization was the secret society. Negro life in New Orleans was honeycombed with them. 'Perhaps no phase of Negro life,' writes H. W. Odum, 'is so characteristic of the race and had developed so rapidly as that which centers around secret societies and fraternal orders.' They pay 'burial expenses, sick benefits, and small amounts to beneficiaries of deceased members.'<sup>3</sup> They also, adds W. E. B. Du Bois, 'furnish pastime from the monotony of work, a field of ambition and intrigue, a chance for parade, and insurance against misfortune.'<sup>4</sup>

Louis Armstrong mentions the names of twenty-two fraternal organizations in his book, *Satchmo*, and adds that his lodge is the Knights of Pythias. Papa Celestin, who died in 1954 at the probable age of seventy, belonged to 'Prince Hall affiliation of Richmond Lodge No. 1, F & AM; Eureka Consistory No. 7, ASRFM; and Radiant Chapter

No. 1, RAM,' according to the *Times Picayune* (17 December 1954). 'Two or three guys would get together, you know,' explains Danny Barker in *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 'and make up the club and it would grow.'

These secret societies, far more numerous than similar white organizations, laid the economic foundation for the Negro brass bands by offering intermittent but frequent employment for musicians. Why were they so numerous? There was a powerful precedent in West Africa. Describing the *gbe* in Dahomey, Herskovits writes:<sup>5</sup>

With elected membership and with ritual secrets in the manner of American lodges, such groups often have large followings and persist over long periods of time. Their primary purpose is to provide their members with adequate financial assistance so that at the funeral of a member's relative . . . he can make a showing in competitive giving that will bring prestige to himself and to his group. Each member must swear a blood oath on joining, and there are adequate controls over the treasurer. Each society has its banner, and indulges in public display of its power and resources in its processions, especially when it goes as a body to the funeral rituals.

Similar societies exist wherever the African landed in the New World. In Trinidad, for example, they are known as '*susu*', from the '*esusu*' of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria.

The parallel to Negro life in New Orleans is very close. When Major Adolphe J. Osey, a member of more than twenty secret societies, died in 1937, the editors of *Gumbo Ya-Ya* report that he was 'waked' for five days and nights and a thirteen-piece band accompanied his coffin to the cemetery.<sup>6</sup> The great importance and the intense appeal of the secret societies are explained in the same book by Sister Johnson:<sup>7</sup>

A woman's got to belong to at least seven secret societies if she 'specs to get buried with any style . . . And the more lodges you belongs to, the more music you gits when you goes

to meet your Maker. I belongs to enough now to have shoes on my feets. I knows right now what I'm gonna have at my wake. I already done checked off chicken salad and coffee.

I'm sure lookin' forward to my wake. They is wakin' me for four nights and I is gonna have the biggest funeral the church ever had. That's why everything I makes goes to the church and them societies.

The drive beneath this explanation, transposed and disguised, seems to be based on the powerful West African custom of ancestor-worship—the spirit of the departed is still very active and must, above all, be appeased.

More particularly, there was a tradition that led to the employment of brass bands at Negro funerals. With the mild exception of the Irish wake, there is nothing in the United States like a New Orleans funeral. But Jelly Roll Morton, born and bred in the Crescent City, saw nothing unusual about it. 'Everybody in the City of New Orleans was always organization minded . . . and a dead man always belonged to several organizations, secret orders . . . We would often wonder where a dead person was located . . . we knew we had plenty of good food that night.'<sup>8</sup>

A Negro funeral in New Orleans is a major celebration. At the end of his description of a funeral, Morton makes a hair-raising pun without conscious irreverence: 'It was the end of a perfect death.' In fact, he summarizes the West African point of view when he concludes (attributing the expression incorrectly to the Bible): 'Rejoice at the death and cry at the birth.' For the rejoicing inevitably included the music of a brass band. 'There were many funerals,' adds Danny Barker, 'that had three or four bands of music.'

Describing the funeral of Sister Cordelia, the editors of *Gumbo Ya-Ya* report:<sup>9</sup>

The wake was anything but dull. One of the sisters described it, 'We had solos and duets and hymn-singin' all night

long. The womens was passin' out right and left. A doctor was kept busy and the smellin' salts was more popular than the food.'

The husband and two daughters made a most spectacular entrance at the funeral, coming up the stairs and into the room, screaming and moaning, alternately. The daughter who hadn't seen her mother for nine years made the most noise . . . She fell to her knees, rocked back and forth, tearing at her hair with her hands. . . .

The church service was just as eventful. After the preaching and the praying and the psalm-singing, members of the various societies circled the casket. Some of them would shout and scream hysterically, finally fainting and having to be carried out. One huge woman taxed the strength of five men. Other sisters just kept walking up and down, releasing screams periodically. This is called the 'walkin' spirits.' One immense sister almost tore down the church when she had a sudden attack of the 'runnin' spirits.' Some of the women trucked, others shook all over, one kept knocking off as many hats as she could possibly reach. . . .

Marching to the cemetery is a mournful and sad affair, but it's an important kind of mournfulness and an impressive kind of sadness . . . they marched with solemnity, with dignity, and gusto . . . The organization banner was red-lined in silver and bore the words 'Young and True Friends' in huge letters of gold. . . .

The ceremonies at the grave were short and simple, but everybody stayed until the last clod of dirt was put on the casket. A sister of the deceased waited until everyone else reached the grave before she began a slow march forward, the crowd parting to let her through; she was supported on each side by a woman, in a condition of semi-prostration, and moaned over and over again, 'I can't stand it!' . . . As she reached the hole in the ground, her knees buckled under her and she collapsed completely.

But when the procession was half a block from the cemetery, en route home, the band burst into 'Just Stay a Little While,' and all the True Friends performed individual and

## 60 - NEW ORLEANS

various dances, and the sister, but lately unconscious with grief, was soon trucking with the rest of them.

The conduct of the mourners at this funeral incidentally is quite formal and ritualized. Take, for example, the hysterical scene at the graveside, performed by the next of kin, and suddenly transformed into a happy, dancing return to town. Latrobe witnessed a part of the same thing in New Orleans in 1819:<sup>10</sup>

The parade of funerals is still a thing which is peculiar to New Orleans . . . As soon as the priests, who were 5 in number, had entered the cemetery, preceded by three boys carrying the usual pair of urns & crucifix on staves, they began their chant, lazily enough, & continued it till they arrived at the grave . . . One of the negro women, who seemed more particularly affected, threw herself into the grave upon the Coffin . . . [I] asked one of the mourners in white . . . if her granddaughter who threw herself into the grave could possibly have felt such excessive distress . . . She shrugged her shoulders two or three times, & then said, 'Je n'en sais rien, cela est une manière.'

The graveside scene was a '*manière*', or custom, which is more West African than European.

The New Orleans drummer, Warren 'Baby' Dodds, once impressed upon me, in conversation, the crucial importance of starting a drum-roll at the correct moment toward the end of the relative's performance at the grave. 'They used to hire me,' said Dodds with some pride, 'because I knew just when to cut in and start the real jazz home.' Old-timers on Wilmington Island, Georgia, remember similar ceremonies with drums only: 'Wen a pusson die, we beat duh drum tuh let ebrybody know . . . we beat duh drum agen at duh fewnul . . . wen we beat duh drum we mahch [march] roun duh grabe in a ring.'<sup>11</sup> The employment of brass bands at funerals in New Orleans,

however, began some time after 1819, for Latrobe speaks only of chanting in the cemetery.

From the point of view of a jazzman, the best part of a funeral took place after the burial. Trumpeter Bunk Johnson's description of the ceremony, recorded by Bill Russell, is unsurpassed:<sup>12</sup>

On the way to the cemetery with an Odd Fellow or a Mason—they always buried with music you see—we would always use slow, slow numbers such as 'Nearer My God to Thee,' 'Flee as a Bird to the Mountains,' 'Come Thee Disconsolate.' We would use most any 4/4, played very slow; they walked very slow behind the body.

After we would get to the cemetery, and after that particular person were put away, the band would come on to the front, out of the graveyard. Then the lodge would come out . . . and they called roll—fall in line, and then we'd march away from the cemetery by the snare drum only, until we got about a block or two blocks from the cemetery. Then we'd go right on into ragtime—what the people call today swing—ragtime. We would play 'Didn't He Ramble,' or we'd take all those spiritual hymns and turn them into ragtime—2/4 movements, you know, step lively everybody. 'Didn't He Ramble,' 'When the Saints Go Marching In,' that good old piece 'Ain't Gonna Study War No More,' and several others we would have and we'd play them just for that effect.

We would have a second line there that was 'most equivalent to King Rex parade—Mardi Gras Carnival parade. The police were unable to keep the second line back—all in the street, all on the sidewalks, in front of the band, and behind the lodge, in front of the lodge. We'd have some immense crowds following. They would follow the funeral up to the cemetery just to get this ragtime music comin' back. Some of the women would have beer cans on their arm. They'd stop and get a half can of beer and drink that to freshen up and follow the band for miles—in the dust, in the dirt, in the street, on the sidewalk, and the Law was trying not to gang the thoroughfare, but just let them have their way. There

## 62 - NEW ORLEANS

wouldn't be any fight or anything of that kind; it would just be dancin' in the street. Even police horse-mounted police—their horse would prance. Music done them all the good in the world. That's the class of music we used on funerals.

Bunk mentions the second line, or dancing followers recruited from the crowd, and many a New Orleans jazzman as a youngster went to school in the second line.

Is there any precedent in the customs of West Africa for the Negro funeral in New Orleans? Indeed there is. Describing a funeral in Dahomey, Herskovits reports:<sup>13</sup>

When the grave is finished, it is left with a mat over its opening. Every morning thereafter, until the body is buried, the children and wives of the deceased enter the house of the dead, fall across the body and weep . . . [after the funeral] Throughout the night, and until an hour or two before dawn, there is drinking and dancing and singing. Tales are recounted dealing with themes of the broadest sexual innuendo, for the native view is that this is the time to amuse the dead, for to moralize to a dead person is both indelicate and senseless.

'Tradition has set it down as bad form,' Herskovits notes, 'to continue to remind an acquaintance of an affliction.'

Something of the West African tradition behind the New Orleans Negro funeral is explained by Herskovits' comments on the significance of funerals in Dahomey:<sup>14</sup>

The Dahomean funeral thus furnishes a point of contact between many aspects of Dahomean life. It is a veritable climax to the life of the individual; the source from which the ancestral cult arises and the sib maintains its supply of souls for future generations. Because of the expenditure of food, money, and materials which it entails, it is connected with the economic life of Dahomey. Indeed, it may be said to be one of the focal institutions which leads to an integrated understanding of Dahomean culture.

Talbot makes a similar point about the Sudanese of Southern Nigeria, Leonard about the Ibos of the lower Niger,

and Rattray about the Ashanti. Funerals were a high point in West African life.

As time goes on and New Orleans becomes more like any other American city, the Negro funeral is disappearing. At the funeral of trumpeter 'Papa' Celestin *Ebony* magazine reports (March 1955) that no jazz was played—'out of respect for Papa.' The Catholic Church frowns upon the custom—with some reason. Who ever heard of such 'carryings on' over a corpse? A deep-rooted tradition from West Africa is being modified.

In 1874, the White League was organized to throw out the Yankee carpetbaggers and keep the Negro in his place. 'Discrimination came in 1889,' said Bunk Johnson flatly. The Creoles of Color were hard hit. Bit by bit, they were pushed out of any job a white man could use, and they lost their place in the downtown parade. 'Quite naturally,' says drummer Baby Dodds in Larry Gara's biography, 'the colored fellows didn't get any of the better jobs.' Eventually and against their will, they went uptown and 'sat in' with their darker brothers. They could play European instruments correctly and they could read music. But, at first, they couldn't play jazz.

Where did the Creoles of Color come from? The Black Code of 1724 made provision for the manumission, or freeing, of slaves. Children shared the status of their mother. When a white aristocrat died, according to Asbury, his will frequently provided that his part-African mistress and slave should be freed. His children by the same woman were automatically free. A class known as Creoles of Color grew up with French and Spanish as well as African blood in their veins.

Sometimes the part-African children of wealthy planters were given all the advantages that the family could provide. Charles Gayarré writes:<sup>15</sup>

By 1830, some of these *gens de couleur* had arrived at such a degree of wealth as to own cotton and sugar plantations with numerous slaves. They educated their children, as they had been educated, in France. Those who chose to remain there, attained, many of them, distinction in scientific and literary circles. In New Orleans they became musicians, merchants, and money and real estate brokers. The humbler classes were mechanics; they monopolized the trade of shoemakers, a trade for which, even to this day, they have a special vocation; they were barbers, tailors, carpenters, upholsterers. They were notably successful hunters and supplied the city with game. As tailors, they were almost exclusively patronized by the *élite*, so much so that the Legoasters', the Dumas', the Clovis', the Lacroix', acquired individually fortunes of several hundred thousands of dollars. . . . At the Orleans theatre they attended their mothers, wives, and sisters in the second tier reserved exclusively for them, and where no white person of either sex would have been permitted to intrude.

The Creoles of Color, Asbury adds, 'in the Southern phrase, knew their places,' although their role in the strict caste system was precarious. Cable's novel, *The Grandissimes*, deals with the tragedy of the darker brother caught in this inter-racial no-man's-land.

The fall of the Creoles of Color was gradual but complete. As Lomax demonstrates in *Mister Jelly Roll*, the ancestry of Morton is a case in point. His grandfather was a member of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1868, his father (according to Morton) was a small business man, and Morton himself worked as a manual laborer in a barrel factory before he escaped to the red-light district of Storyville. His Creole grandmother immediately disowned him but Morton was making big money. A familiarity with light classical music and European technique was part of his Creole background and helped him to contribute new elements to jazz.

The Creoles of Color had much to learn about jazz

which their academic training could not give them. The light-skinned Creole clarinetist, Alphonse Picou, who was seventy-three years old in 1953 when I interviewed him, could still remember the difficulties he had. 'When I was very young,' he told me, 'I took lessons from the flute player at the French Opera House. He made me practice fingering for six months before I was permitted to play a note.' While still in his teens, Picou was invited to play in the jazz orchestra of his friend, the trombone player Bouboul Augustat. Picou was shocked when he discovered that they had no written music. He was expected to improvise. 'Bouboul told me, "Just listen," and I sat there not knowing what to do. After a while I caught on and started playing two or three notes for one.'

It was Picou who first adapted the piccolo part from the march version of 'High Society' to jazz—a technical but not very creative feat. It has become a standard solo for jazz clarinet whenever the tune is played, and modern jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker have quoted parts of it in the course of their improvising. Picou's eyes light up as he remembers the first time. 'I just happened to think of playing it that way one night and the crowd went wild. They kept requesting it over and over and wouldn't let me stop.' To this day, Picou retains a semi-legitimate tone and style without the vitality of a Johnny Dodds.

The Creole violinist, Paul Dominguez, explained to Alan Lomax how his friends had to compete with the darker Negroes uptown:<sup>18</sup>

See, us Downtown people, we didn't think so much of this rough Uptown jazz until we couldn't make a living otherwise . . . they made a fiddler out of a violinist—me, I'm talking about. A fiddler is *not* a violinist but a violinist can be a fiddler. If I wanted to make a living, I had to be rowdy like the other group. I had to jazz it or rag it or any other damn thing . . . Bolden cause all that. He cause these younger Cre-

oles, men like Bechet and Keppard, to have a different style altogether from the old heads like Tio and Perez. I don't know how they do it. But goddam, they'll do it. Can't tell you what's there on the paper, but just play the hell out of it.

Dominguez had been left stranded with his Creole prejudices. And yet the chronicles of jazz are crowded with the names of Creoles of Color who made the jump to jazz successfully: Ory, Bechet, Bigard, Celestin, Dutrey, Picou, Robichaux, Simeon, St. Cyr, and so forth.

They brought their knowledge of European instruments and technique with them and merged with the darker pioneers who thought of any instrument simply as an extension of the human voice. 'If you can't sing it,' says New Orleans trumpeter Mutt Carey in *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 'you can't play it. When I'm improvising, I'm singing in my mind. I sing what I feel and then try to reproduce it on the horn.' And all of it blended with the thriving brass bands employed by the fraternal societies. The result was a competently played march music that had also begun to swing, an elementary kind of jazz that would still be recognizable as such today.

UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTH CAROLINA  
LIBRARIES

## 7 | Buddy Bolden and the Growth of Jazz

Battles of music, once known as 'carving contests,' have occurred—and still occur—frequently in the history of jazz. In early New Orleans days, they say it was Armstrong versus Kid Rena (this is pure legend), or Red Allen versus Guy Kelly, or Joe Oliver (later, 'King') versus Freddie Keppard. 'If you couldn't blow a man down with your horn,' declares trumpeter Mutt Carey in *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 'at least you could use it to hit him alongside the head.' In the 'thirties in Kansas City it was saxophonist Coleman Hawkins versus Lester Young, while in New York it was trombonist Big Green versus Jimmy Harrison. (At the Bandbox in 1953 it was the entire bands of Count Basie and Duke Ellington.) In a free-wheeling music such as jazz, a musician is judged by his capacity for sustained and swinging improvisation.

The first and archetypical legend in jazz is the life of Charles 'Buddy' Bolden, who never lost a carving contest. He was almost eight years old before the dances at Congo Square came to an end, and he probably knew all about *vodun* and attended his share of secret meetings. He grew up in the midst of the brass-band craze and he mastered a European instrument, the cornet. As a child, he was a part of a shouting congregation in church. He was heir to all the musical influences that survived in and around

New Orleans. And the sounds that burst from his cornet helped to establish a new music.

Bolden was born in 1868 in the rough-and-ready uptown section of New Orleans. He ran a barber shop, edited a scandal sheet called 'The Cricket,' and around 1897 organized the first out-and-out jazz band. He was the first jazzman to earn the title 'King' by popular acclaim. For seven years he was the undisputed champ. Then, at the age of twenty-nine, he ran amuck during a parade and was committed to the State Hospital at Angola on 5 June 1907. He died twenty-four years later.

Six years before his death, Bolden was given a routine examination by Dr. S. B. Hays:<sup>1</sup>

Accessible and answers fairly well. Paranoid delusions, also grandiosed. Auditory hallucinations and visual. Talks to self. Much reaction. Picks things off the wall. Tears his clothes. Insight and judgment lacking. Looks deteriorated but memory is good. . . . Has a string of talk that is incoherent. Hears the voices of people that bothered him before he came here. History of one month in House of Detention on account of alcohol. Diagnosis: Dementia praecox, paranoid type.

In the official records there is no inkling of the fact that women once fought for the privilege of carrying Buddy's cornet.

The folk heroes of jazz have often been celebrated for enormous appetites of all kinds, and Bolden set a pattern that has been followed by many young men with horns. He lived hard and he 'died' young. Old-timer Albert Glenny remembers Bolden as a 'good dresser,' while Jelly Roll Morton says that 'he drink all the whiskey he could find . . . always having a ball.' Above all, Bolden was a ladies' man, and in the words of the Belgian author Robert Goffin, 'Il doit encore rendre les femmes rouges-chaudes!'<sup>2</sup> Bolden probably never recorded, although the wishful

thought of ancient Edison cylinders keeps circulating, but we know that at one time his band consisted of cornet, clarinet, trombone, violin, guitar, string bass, and drums. They played at saloons, dance halls, parades, picnics, lawn parties, carnivals, and parks. (When the band came through Plaquemine, Louisiana, on an excursion sometime before 1906, thirteen-year-old Clarence Williams ran away from home to New Orleans. 'I had never heard anything like that before in my whole life.') Tin Type Hall on Liberty Street in uptown New Orleans was the band's favorite location. And they played polkas, quadrilles, rag-time tunes, and blues—all by ear.

But Bolden's specialty was the blues. An uptown dance at Tin Type Hall is described in *Jazzmen*:<sup>3</sup>

In the daytime, Tin Type Hall was used as a sort of morgue, for here the hustlers and roustabouts were always laid out when they were killed. The hustlers, gamblers, and race track followers were often hard-working musicians in their off seasons, or when luck turned and they needed a little ready cash. At night, however, the Tin Type trembled with life and activity, especially when Bolden was 'socking it out.' The 'high class' or 'dicty' people didn't go to such lowdown affairs as the Tin Type dances. At about twelve o'clock, when the ball was getting right, the more respectable Negroes who did attend went home. Then Bolden played a number called *Don't Go Away Nobody*, and the dancing got rough. When the orchestra settled down to the slow blues, the music was mean and dirty, as Tin Type roared full blast.

On slow blues, such as 'Careless Love' and '2:19 Took My Baby Away,' Bolden was at his best. 'Bolden went to church,' Bud Scott claims, 'and that's where he got his idea of jazz music. Negro religious music and blues were always closely related.'

All the musicians who heard Bolden agree on two things: Buddy couldn't read a note and he played the most power-

ful horn of all time. Louis Armstrong (who was seven years old when Bolden ran amuck and therefore a not too reliable witness) speaks of Bolden's style as 'a little too rough,' while Morton says:<sup>4</sup>

Buddy Bolden was the most powerful trumpet in history. I remember we'd be hanging around some corner, wouldn't know that there was going to be a dance out at Lincoln Park. Then we'd hear old Buddy's trumpet coming on and we'd all start. Any time it was a quiet night at Lincoln Park because maybe the affair hadn't been so well publicized, Buddy Bolden would publicize it! He'd turn his big trumpet around toward the city and blow his blues, calling his children home, as he used to say. The whole town would know Buddy Bolden was at the Park, ten or twelve miles from the center of town. He was the blowingest man ever lived since Gabriel.

Albert Glenny, who once played bass with Bolden, estimates that 'Buddy was louder than Louis Armstrong with the microphone turned on.' Thus, Fred Ramsey suggests that the term 'loud,' so frequently used to describe Bolden's playing by those who actually heard him, may be a way of saying that the music as a whole was rough and unfamiliar—with 'hoarseness, a notable lack of harmony, and a high level of heterophony' (voices close to but not quite in unison)—in other words, a way of describing *a new manner of playing*. This interesting speculation makes excellent sense in connection with the very early brass band music Ramsey located in the Southern countryside.

Did Bolden play ragtime or jazz? Would he sound old-fashioned or modern today? Glenny says that he was 'the best for ragtime,' but Bunk Johnson insisted that Bolden 'could step out right today, play his own style, and be called "hot." Wallace Collins, who played tuba with Bolden, told Rudi Blesh that Buddy would 'take one note and put two or three to it.' That sounds like ragtime. But

then, trombonist Willy Cornish, speaking of the rhythms, says, 'when we got going good, they'd cross three times at once.' That sounds like jazz. The truth is that Bolden probably played a transitional style that could be either 'raggy' or 'hot.' When he played a ragtime tune such as 'Maple Leaf Rag' by Scott Joplin, which he memorized, he followed a syncopated melody which gave the music a 'raggy' sound. When he played the blues, however, he probably used blue tonality and the flowing rhythms that crossed 'three times at once.'

Before Buddy Bolden was put away in 1907, New Orleans saw the rise of many other jazzmen. They were using European instruments without benefit of orthodox instruction, and they were playing European tunes. But their conception of how these instruments and tunes should be played was influenced by their West African heritage. The tunes were a point of departure for endless variations, instruments were an extension of the human voice, and both were welded together by a propulsive march rhythm.

In Bolden's day, *playing jazz* was usually an avocation, a part-time job, integrated with the everyday life of the Negro community. 'Most of the musicians had day jobs,' says Zutty Singleton. It was a folk music and the distinction between performer and audience was shadowy. But with the opening of Storyville, the official red-light district, in 1897, things began to change. Playing jazz became a full-time profession for some, and the occupational hazards of working while others enjoyed themselves became more or less standardized.

In 1910, there were 'almost two hundred houses of pleasure,' according to *Jazzmen*, as well as 'nine cabarets, many "dance schools," innumerable honky-tonks, barrel-houses, and gambling joints.' The 101 Ranch, a cabaret which employed many jazzbands, was particularly famous, and it was there that trombonist Preston Jackson recalls

seeing the white kids who later became world-famous as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, hanging around and listening open-mouthed to the music. The changes of personnel and location were endless, but Storyville kept a dozen or so bands working every night.

'Jazz wasn't born in Storyville,' said old-time school teacher and trumpeter Johnny Wiggs in an interview, 'it came long before that.' Storyville helped to establish a special kind of jazzman: the solo pianist. He made more money than an entire jazzband. Jelly Roll Morton took in fifteen or eighteen dollars a night at Lulu White's, while the band musicians got from one to two-and-a-half dollars apiece at the cabarets. (It was poetic justice of a sort because the New Orleans jazzbands, with their marching-band tradition, did not use a piano in the early days.) 'You never had to [could] figure on getting work in the District,' says guitarist Danny Barker, 'so it wasn't so important when it closed [in 1917]. Very few jazzmen ever played in a brothel out of choice.'

At the same time, the solo pianists of Storyville were assimilating the rolling rhythms of the brass bands. In so doing they went a step beyond the ragtime style of the day. A transitional figure in this sense, Morton helped to spread the newer style in the course of his endless travels, while the band rhythms made him the victor in 'carving contests' all over the country. By 1917, Storyville was closed, New Orleans was sunk in a business depression, and jazzmen were looking north for employment.

From around 1900, a music that we should probably recognize today as jazz began to be played in New Orleans. We have been stressing the West African elements in the blend, since they determined the unique character of the music, but what were the European influences? Echoes of almost any Old World music can be found in New Orleans

jazz. Bit by bit, the Protestant folk manner of singing psalms and hymns, with its free embellishments, lining-out form, and non-harmonic horizontal feeling made itself felt in and around Latin-Catholic New Orleans—especially in revival singing—and dove-tailed neatly with the overall development. The American Negro did not need to borrow any rhythms, but rather adapted and limited himself to the European march beat, building upon it. He cheerfully borrowed European melodies and transformed them by improvisation. Above all, he gradually mastered European harmony—an element which was not entirely new to him—and proceeded to color it with blue tonality.

Tracing specific European melodies in jazz is a thankless task. British ballads, for example, were no doubt played by jazzmen, but the emphasis was upon the manner of playing while the tunes themselves were quickly transformed into something else. Spanish melodies were more hardy, frequently because they had already blended with West African influences in the West Indies. A large borrowing consisted of Afro-Spanish rhythms such as the tango and rhumba, which Jelly Roll Morton called the 'Spanish tinge.' By 1914, when W. C. Handy composed 'St. Louis Blues,' he used a *tangana* rhythm in the verse. By then, however, the tango had been the craze for some time in New York City.

As might be expected, the French influence is perhaps the greatest European influence on New Orleans jazz. It merged with rhumba rhythms to produce Creole songs, some of which were published as early as 1867 in *Slave Songs of the United States*. (Eighty years later, the rhumba became a Tin-Pan Alley commodity.) Jelly Roll Morton demonstrates how a French quadrille was adapted to the jazz idiom (Circle JM 1-2). The name of the quadrille was 'La Marseillaise' (not the French national anthem), and the contrasting time signatures of its five sections were

changed to duple rhythm—with appropriate embellishments.

The fortunes of this quadrille in New Orleans are legendary. Originally called 'Praline'—a ragged kind of candy—it was known in Storyville as 'Get Out of Here and Go Home.' Later, it was entitled 'Jack Carey' and then 'Number Two Rag' when the Dixieland Five played it around 1914. The Original Dixieland Jass (sic) Band, a white group from New Orleans, made the first recording of it in 1917 under the name of 'Tiger Rag,' and the title stuck.

Confirmation of the French origin of 'Tiger Rag' comes from an unexpected source. The Belgian author, Robert Goffin, identifies the number as 'the distorted theme of the second tableau of a quadrille I used to hear as a boy, at all the balls of Walloon, Belgium.' Further, he adds that the military bands of every French village played two marches that can be easily identified as the New Orleans jazz standards, 'Panama' and 'High Society.' In these rare cases, the actual melody was retained, probably because it was so well known, although in actual performance the variations were—and still are—practically endless.

Finally, if we had to choose a date when the over-all direction switched from European elements *dominating* African elements to European elements *being influenced* by a new combination dominated by African elements, it would be around 1900. It is a question of the general trend. European and African music continued to blend, of course, but something unusual had occurred. From the previous blending, a music had evolved in New Orleans with a distinct character of its own. It struck the public, and quite rightly, as something entirely new, and it began to spread, grow, and influence all American popular music.

The general style later became known as 'Dixieland,' especially when played by white musicians, and it spread

fan-wise to the North until it became the rage of the Jazz Age. In the meantime, the Great Awakening, minstrelsy, the spiritual, and ragtime had evolved outside of New Orleans. They all borrowed certain African elements in turn and paved the way for the acceptance of jazz. They were a little more European in feeling, however, while jazz was something else again—a new music.

**PART THREE : THE AMERICAN  
BACKGROUND**

---

**8**

## The Great Awakening

Around 1800, a religious mass movement in the United States known as 'The Great Awakening' produced a frontier revival and a music that was of, by, and for the people. At a series of hysterical camp meetings from Northampton, Massachusetts, to Cane Ridge, Kentucky, spiritual songs and revival hymns were re-created in a new form and spirit. The poor and lowly people who attended the camp meetings preferred a style which happened to fit the overall feeling of brotherhood and the general urge for freedom of expression. And a new kind of mass blending of the two musical traditions of Europe and West Africa took place in the United States.

There had been famous Negro preachers before the American Revolution. James Weldon Johnson writes:<sup>1</sup>

The history of the Negro preacher reaches back to Colonial days. Before the Revolutionary War, when slavery had not yet taken on its more grim and heartless economic aspects, there were famed black preachers who preached to both whites and blacks. George Liele was preaching to whites and blacks at Augusta, Ga., as far back as 1773, and Andrew Bryan at Savannah a few years later. The most famous of these earliest preachers was Black Harry, who during the Revolutionary period accompanied Bishop Asbury as a drawing card and preached from the same platform with other founders of the

Methodist Church. Of him, John Ledman in his *History of the Rise of Methodism in America* says, 'The truth was that Harry was a more popular speaker than Mr. Asbury or almost anyone else in his day.'

A rhythmic style of preaching made Black Harry the real attraction. Carter G. Woodson tells an anecdote about Black Harry's tours with Bishop Asbury:<sup>2</sup>

On one occasion in Wilmington, Delaware, where the cause of the Methodist was unpopular, a large number of persons came out of curiosity to hear Bishop Asbury. But, as the auditorium was already taxed to its fullest capacity, they could only hear from the outside. At the conclusion of the exercises, they said, without having seen the speaker: 'If all Methodist preachers can preach like the Bishop, we should like to be constant hearers.' Some one present replied: 'That was not the Bishop, but the Bishop's servant that you heard.' This to be sure, had the desired effect, for these inquiries concluded: 'If such be the servant, what must the master be?'

The techniques of these early Negro preachers and their effects on the audience are revealed in a description of preacher John Jasper at a funeral. 'His vivid and spectacular eloquence resulted in an uproar of groans, shouts, fainting women, and people who were swept to the ground to lie in a trance-like state sometimes for hours.'<sup>3</sup>

As the plantations grew larger and slavery became a grim and profitable business, these Negro preachers disappeared because their very presence made the slaves restless and interfered with work. Much later, after the Civil War, they reappeared in segregated churches of their own, and are thriving to this day.

The slaves as well as the Negro preachers seem to have shared in the religious music of the United States before the American Revolution. But it was a special kind of religious music. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Virginia evangelist John Davies was preaching to the slaves

with great success and noted their taste in a letter to John Wesley:<sup>4</sup>

All the books were very acceptable, but none more so than the Psalms and Hymns, which enabled them to gratify their peculiar taste for psalmody . . . and sometimes when I have awaked, at two or three in the morning, a torrent of sacred psalmody has poured into my chamber. In this exercise some of them spend the whole night . . .

In another letter, he says:<sup>5</sup>

. . . the Negroes, above all of the human species I ever knew, have the nicest ear for music. They have a kind of ecstatic delight in psalmody . . .

This psalmody, or singing the words of Biblical psalms, frequently employed a style of its own, a style which appealed to the Negroes.

In a chapter on the 'Early New England Folk Style' of psalmody, Gilbert Chase in his *America's Music* describes the style:<sup>6</sup>

. . . its main characteristics are singing by ear rather than by note or 'rule'; the raising or lowering of notes at will; the adding of grace notes, turns, and other embellishments; the 'sliding' from one note to another; the adding of parts at the intervals of a fourth, a fifth, and an octave; and the practice of 'lining out,' with the leader reading or chanting the verses of the psalm, one or two lines at a time, and the congregation singing them afterward.

This series of characteristics parallel many characteristics of West African music—with the notable exception of the rhythm. To the newly arrived African, then, this music furnished something to build on.

Take the custom of 'lining out,' which lent itself so easily to the West African call-and-response pattern. We can trace the former to the British Isles where, in 1644,

the Westminster Assembly recommended the adoption of the practice in English churches because the congregation couldn't read. A hundred years later, churches in Scotland refused to give up the procedure even though the congregation knew all the words by heart. 'Lining out' had become an organic part of the style. Musical reformers approved of the practice, however, and in 1699 it was abolished in the fashionable Brattle Square Church in Cambridge. Even though the big cities gave it up, 'lining out' spread to the rural areas south and west (by way of the itinerant Yankee music teacher) and established itself among the folk where it still exists.

Later on, during the Great Awakening, the folk hymn became popular. A ballad tune with religious words, the folk hymn often adopted the call-and-response pattern in order to answer the needs of outdoor preaching and shouting congregations. Harmony in the European sense was neglected. The hymn books of the day stressed part-singing which harmonized only by accident, and the 'shape-note' and 'fasola' systems of notation emphasized interesting, horizontal parts for each singer, rather than vertical chords combining all the voices. The days of barbershop harmony were far in the future and, meanwhile, the freedom from harmony gave a melodic and rhythmic liberty which proved attractive to the West African ear. In this way the blending of African and British folk style was accelerated.

An example of this merging is the tune of 'Wondrous Love,' which was taken from the ballad of 'The Wicked Captain Kidd.' In these early days, hymn books printed only the words, *not* the music—a situation that encouraged improvisation. As G. G. Johnson says:<sup>7</sup>

Camp meeting leaders abandoned the usual church hymns and composed, sometimes extemporaneously, songs which more nearly suited the spirit of the meeting.

This extemporaneous composition, whereby 'the volume of song burst all bonds of guidance and control,' also transformed the melody into a blend of European and West African qualities. Gilbert Chase adds that the tune we know as 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' was a jumping revival number with a 'Hallelujah' response long before Julia Ward Howe wrote 'Mine eyes have seen the glory . . .' A key to the general process is revealed by Professor John W. Work's discovery of a variant version of 'Rock of Ages,' which was radically changed at a revival meeting where tunes were freely embellished in the folk style.

Consider the situation: the preacher wants more mass participation with music, outdoors. The call-and-response pattern and a compelling rhythm are therefore essential. After each line of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'He comes, he comes, the Judge severe,' for example, revivalists added the refrain, 'Roll, Jordan, roll!' Similarly, march rather than waltz rhythms were employed and the words subordinated to an impromptu expressiveness which favored improvisation and 'composing' on the spot. In short, the blend of British hymn and folk song became partly Africanized.

Why did the Great Awakening spread so rapidly and reach its peak in the South? The reasons are fairly simple. In New England such Puritan preachers as Jonathan Edwards, who signed his letters 'Yours in the bowels of Christ,' were terrifying their contemporaries with threats of inescapable hell-fire. According to Calvinist beliefs, only a very, very few were among the elect and would go to heaven; the great majority were horribly doomed and would go straight to hell. Edwards' sermons were frightening—people fainted in terror—but the sermons were also discouraging and depressing.

In contrast, we have the dissenting preachers who broke

## 84 - THE AMERICAN BACKGROUND

away from Calvinism and journeyed South to more fertile fields announcing that grace was free and everyone had a good chance of eternal life. Before the American Revolution, such renegade preachers were jailed; afterwards, they were let alone and religious freedom became a fact. Among the pioneering settlers of what was then the West—Kentucky and Tennessee—these preachers were naturally popular. The poor, the social outcast, and the Negro flocked to hear the new and democratic gospel.

One of these preachers, Shubal Stearns, called the 'Boston Baptist Branerges' by G. P. Jackson, was a distant ancestor of my own. He took the Separate Baptist creed, based on 'conviction and conversion,' from New England to Sandy Creek, North Carolina, in 1755. An eyewitness, Morgan Edwards, who visited North Carolina in 1771 and 1772, remarks that 'the neighborhood was alarmed and the Spirit of God listed to blow as a mighty rushing wind.' Within three years, the Separates had three churches and over nine hundred members. Describing Stearns' technique, Edwards writes:<sup>8</sup>

His voice was musical and strong, which he managed in such a manner, as, one while, to make soft impressions on the heart, and fetch tears from the eyes in a mechanical way; and anon, to shake the very nerves and throw the animal system into tumults and perturbations.

Edwards also noted 'crying out . . . falling down as in fits, and awakening in ecstasies.'

Although white men played a leading role in these early revivals, the Negro also participated fully. In *White and Negro Spirituals*, G. P. Jackson says:<sup>9</sup>

. . . the negro found himself among real friends—among those who, by reason of their ethnic, social and economic background, harbored a minimum of racial prejudice; among those whose religious practices came nearest to what he—by

nature a religious person—could understand and participate in. He found himself a churchless pioneer among those white people who built meeting houses and invited him not only to attend their services and sing their songs but also to join with them in full membership; white people who were concerned not only with his soul's welfare but also even with his release from slavery.

These preachers were potential Abolitionists, preaching a gospel of equality before God, and white man and Negro sang their religious music standing side by side, their voices blending.

One of the high points of the Great Awakening occurred in the summer of 1801 at the Cane Ridge camp meeting, about twenty-five miles north of Lexington, Kentucky. A composite picture of the meeting is drawn by F. M. Davenport from various accounts of eyewitnesses in his *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*:<sup>10</sup>

It was at night that the most terrible scenes were witnessed, when the camp-fires blazed in a mighty circle around the vast audience of pioneers . . . As the darkness deepened, the exhortations of the preachers became more fervent and impassioned, their picturesque prophecies of doom more lurid and alarming, the volume of song burst all bonds of guidance and control, and broke again and again from the throats of the people, while over all, at intervals, there rang out the shout of ecstasy, the sob and the groan . . . Men and women shouted aloud during the sermon, and shook hands all around at the close in what was termed 'the singing ecstasy' . . . the crowd at Cane Ridge [went] rushing from preacher to preacher if it were whispered that it was 'more lively' at some other point, swarming enthusiastically around a 'fallen' brother, laughing, leaping, sobbing, shouting, swooning . . . The whole body of persons who actually fell helpless to the earth during the progress of the meeting was computed . . . to be three thousand . . . Those who fell were carried to the meeting-house near by. 'At no time was the floor less than half covered. Some

lay quiet, unable to move or speak. Some talked, but could not move . . . Some, shrieking in agony, bounded about like a live fish out of water. Many lay down and rolled over and over for hours at a time. Others rushed wildly over the stumps and benches, and then plunged, shouting, "Lost! Lost!" into the forest.'

Offhand, this sounds like a West African religious ceremony—gone mad. There are, in fact, more than a few resemblances.

A gradual change was taking place in the British-Protestant religions and new fashions in the manner of religious worship were developing. A person's social status came to be judged—and quite accurately—by the symptoms of his religious hysteria. Of course the rich plantation owners, who possessed the best tobacco land and most of the slaves, disapproved of camp meetings. Camp meetings made slaves unruly. G. G. Johnson says:<sup>11</sup>

Many educated ministers and laymen were from the first opposed to the Great Revival . . . the gentry, as a rule, held aloof from camp meetings . . . A revival usually met with some active opposition.

The Reverend Samuel McCorkle, for example, couldn't make up his mind whether or not the Great Awakening was an act of God. He was a Presbyterian.

Reverend McCorkle was also disturbed by the class of people who were enjoying the camp meetings. He noted that persons with weak nerves, women, adolescents, and Negroes were most frequently moved to hysteria of an unregulated nature. On the other hand, the Reverend Joseph Travis saw certain notables 'stricken to the floor, as if shot by a deadly arrow,' who 'for an hour or so remained speechless, breathless, pulseless, and, to all appearances, perfectly dead.' Then with a heavenly smile, they would 'look up, stand up, and shout aloud, "Glory, glory to God! My soul

is converted, and I am happy.'" This was the way of the grand and wealthy.

The vast majority had other symptoms, known as 'exercises,' which came to be classified under such titles as laughing, dancing, wheeling, barking, and jerking. Preacher Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834), who carried the gospel all over the United States and even to England, writes in his *Journal*:<sup>12</sup>

I have seen Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, Baptists, Church of England, and Independents, exercised with the jerks; Gentleman and Lady, black and white, the aged and the youth, rich and poor, without exception . . .

(Dow, like other Northern preachers, was heckled now and then because he openly condemned mistreatment of the Negro.) Perhaps jerking was considered the most vulgar of the exercises, but it gradually came to be the most widespread. G. G. Johnson says:<sup>13</sup>

The jerking exercise, or the jerks, as it was commonly called, together with the dancing and barking exercises, did not appear at the beginning of the Great Revival. The Reverend Eli Caruthers refers to these phenomena as 'fungi, which grew out of the revival in its state of decay.' At first, the jerks were manifested by an involuntary twitching of the arms; later this twitching spread over all the body. It was perhaps the most contagious of the exercises. Sometimes the mere mention of it was enough to set most of a congregation to jerking . . .

Whenever a woman was taken with the jerks at a camp meeting her friends formed a circle about her, for the exercise was so violent that she could scarcely maintain a correct posture. Men would go bumping about over benches, into trees, bruising and cutting themselves, if friends did not catch and hold them. Some were ashamed of having the jerks, but most persons agreed that it was impossible to resist them.

I have witnessed these symptoms, even to the circle of friends protecting the one possessed, at *vodun* ceremonies

in Haiti, where the music was more exciting and the behavior of the participants was more controlled.

Where did 'the jerks' come from? In the Ulster revival of 1755, the symptoms were different. F. M. Davenport was puzzled by it:<sup>14</sup>

In Kentucky the motor automatisms, the voluntary muscles in violent action, were the prevailing type, although there were many of the sensory. On the other hand, in Ulster the sensory automatisms, trance, vision, the physical disability and the sinking of muscular energy were the prevailing type, although there were many of the motor. I do not mean that I can explain it.

In other words, in the Old World revivalists went to sleep; in the New World they woke up, violently. 'It is just in the forms of motor behavior remarked on as characteristic of the "automatisms" of the . . . Kentucky revivals,' says Professor Herskovits, 'that aboriginal modes of African worship are to be marked off from those of Europe.'<sup>15</sup>

By 1820 there were about 40,000 Negro Methodists and 60,000 Negro Baptists. The Baptist Church had the greatest appeal for Negroes because of its informal organization. A group of four was enough to constitute a congregation and anyone who felt the call might preach. A poor but fervent denomination, the Baptists were closest to the economic level of the Negro, while Baptist religious practices happened to duplicate certain African customs, including 'total immersion' which corresponded to customs of the West African river cults, and the uninhibited manner of 'getting religion' which is similar to West African spirit possession.

Today, the wheel has come full circle and white revival meetings have adopted Negro songs, styles, and rhythms. A gap still remains. Comparing white and Negro camp meetings, Dr. Hortense Powdermaker comments:<sup>16</sup>

A further, less definable difference seems due to an impression of greater rhythm and spontaneity in the Negro revival, not wholly accounted for by the greater participation of the audience. The rhythm of the white minister's speech was more halting than that of the Negro minister, and shaped to a less vigorous melodic line. The movements of the white congregation were more convulsive and jerky than those of the Negroes.

It should not be surprising that the Negro excels in a manner of worship that is a central part of his heritage.

The Great Awakening, then, led to the first extensive blending in the United States—outside of New Orleans—of European and West African music. It was a grass-roots phenomenon that took place mainly within a shifting frontier population, although the aristocrats of the East coast were also touched by it. One of its by-products was a subtle education for many Americans in West African musical characteristics, which sold themselves on their own merits. When the next step in the over-all process took place, the blending could start on a more advanced level.

## 9

## The Work Song

With the Great Awakening, the blend of European and West African elements in religious music becomes evident; with the work song a similar blend in secular music begins. Perhaps because it was associated (among other things) with labor and not the church, the work song did not enter and influence the widening stream of American popular music as quickly or as noticeably as, say, the spiritual. It remained in the background, beyond earshot of most white people, a mixture that preserved and fostered a number of West African qualities.

The machine is probably the greatest enemy of the work song, which survives best today in Southern penitentiaries where forced manual labor is still used. The function of the work song, as the name indicates, is purely utilitarian—to co-ordinate the efforts of the workers. The chain gang is the clearest example. Bound together, the men must move together, and the work song furnishes a rhythmic cue. In such a situation, the plantation overseer was hardly interested in the style of singing, and many African characteristics are preserved by default.

A good work-song leader, as Leadbelly once boasted, was always in demand. To the worker, it meant passing the time more bearably; to the boss, it meant a more efficient team. The performance of a talented leader of work songs

sometimes resembles a strenuous tightrope act. He can don the mask of apparent conformity to the 'Cap'n,' or white boss, and at the same time entertain the gang by embroidering upon the mask with extemporaneous satire, *double-entendre*, and even veiled threats of escape.

Alan Lomax calls the work song a 'spiritual speed-up,' which is literally the case when the gang—as they often did—adapted a religious tune to their own requirements. It was also a morale-building vehicle of not-so-passive resistance, which reinforced the impulse to employ African idioms by the need for concealing open hostility. As a result, the work song to this day shows little European influence and retains a great many West African qualities.

If we examine the music of West Africa, we find that the work song is almost universal. The African musicologist, Nicholas Ballanta-Taylor, describes it:<sup>1</sup>

Music in Africa is not cultivated for its own sake. It is always used in connection with dances or to accompany workmen. The rhythmic interest of the songs impels them to work and takes away the feeling of drudgery . . .

[The work song is] mainly rhythmic—short phrases mostly of two or three bars; solo and chorus follow each other instantly; the chorus is in many instances composed of two or three ejaculatory words, answered by the workmen.

The importance of the rhythm and the continuous play of the call-and-response pattern is clear.

In all parts of the New World, the work song is sung wherever Africans are found, for this type of music is an integral part of an African tradition of mutual help. Herskovits, for example, explains how widespread this tradition is:<sup>2</sup>

The tradition of cooperation in the field of economic endeavor is outstanding in Negro cultures everywhere . . . This tradition, carried over into the New World, is manifest in the

cargoes; one man taking the burden of the song (and the slack of the rope) and the others striking in with the chorus.

This pre-Civil War observer was no doubt hearing a sea shanty, a type of work song that made contact with popular music by way of the minstrel show.

The story of jazz and the sea shanty has never been told. The invention of the cotton gin had made a profitable business of exporting American cotton to British mills. Annual shipments of cotton rose from 96 million pounds in 1815 to 444 million pounds in 1837, and American ships began to carry more and more world trade. Ships called at cotton ports from Savannah to New Orleans, and the popularity of the sea shanty reached its peak.

Because of sailors' varied national origins and far-flung ports of call, the sea shanty traveled all over the world. By 1845, when minstrel shows were beginning to prosper, sea shanties were frequently presented and—an interesting exchange—minstrel tunes such as 'Gimme de Banjo,' 'Do John Boker,' and 'De Camptown Races' became well-known sea shanties. Since many of these tunes were originally adaptations of Negro folk music, however, we often cannot tell whether they were taken to sea in their folk or minstrel versions.

'There were no finer shantymen,' writes Doerflinger, '. . . than the Negroes.'<sup>7</sup> Laboring as roustabouts on the Mississippi, working as stevedores along the Eastern coast, or shipping out from the Gulf ports as members of a crew, Negroes set an indelible stamp upon such shanties as 'Roll the Cotton Down,' 'A Long Time Ago,' and 'Shallo Brown.' It was the custom to set sail with a starboard watch of Negroes and a port watch of whites, but the work-song leader was usually a Negro.

The leader had to give the song enough lift and drive to get the work done:<sup>8</sup>

Way down South where I was born,  
*Roll the cotton down:*  
 I worked in the cotton and the corn,  
*Oh, roll the cotton down.*  
 When I was young and in my prime,  
*Roll the cotton down:*  
 I thought I'd go and join the Line,  
*Oh, roll the cotton down.*  
 And for a sailor caught a shine,  
*Roll the cotton down:*  
 I joined on a ship of the Black Ball Line,  
*Oh, roll the cotton down.*

—and so on, with the leader improvising whatever words and melody came to mind and the crew roaring out the refrain in steady chorus as they bent to their task.

Although we are dealing primarily with a manner and style of singing, the general outlines of a few melodies can be traced back to earlier sources. The shanty 'Lowlands,' which satirized working conditions among stevedores in Mobile, is taken from a British ballad dealing with a domestic tragedy. Many shanties were also taken from the English Music Hall tradition. On the other hand, another shanty, 'Rock About My Saro Jane,' sung by roustabouts on the Mississippi, is very close to the blues—the backbone of jazz. The amount of European or West African influence on any one shanty depended pretty much on who was singing it at the time, but as a type of work song the sea shanty furnishes an example of an early and world-wide blending of Euro-African musical qualities.

The sea shanty has practically disappeared, although it is still sung, as Tony Schwartz has demonstrated, by the menhaden fishermen off Barnegat Light. In other contexts, however, the work song is still very much with us. In 1924-5, Odum and Johnson collected a large assort-

ment from many occupations, which they edited in *Negro Workaday Songs*:<sup>9</sup>

Whoever has seen a railroad section gang of five score Negroes working with pick and shovel and hammer and bars and other tools, and has heard them singing together will scarcely question the effectiveness of the scene . . .

Four pickmen of the road sing, swinging pick up, whirling it now round and round and now down again, movement well punctuated with nasal grunt and swelling song. Another group unloading coal, another asphalt, another lime, or sand, sing unnumbered songs and improvisations. Another group sings as workers rush wheelbarrows loaded with stone or sand or dirt or concrete, or still again line up on the roadside with picks and shovels. And of course there are the songs of the chain gangs . . .

All these singers constitute the great body of workers and singers who sing apparently with unlimited repertoire.

Whereas early travelers heard rowing songs and sea shanties, later specialists found work songs wherever group labor existed.

The classic description of a work song in full blast occurs in John and Alan Lomax's *Folk Song U.S.A.*<sup>10</sup>

The hot Southern sun shines down on the brown and glossy muscles of the work gang. The picks make whirling rainbow arcs around the shoulders of the singers. As the picks dig into the rock, the men give a deep, guttural grunt; their pent-up strength flows through the pick handle and they relax their bodies and prepare for the next blow.

The song leader now begins—pick handle twirling in his palms, the pickhead flashing in the sun:

*Take this hammo—Huh!*

The men grunt as the picks bite in together. They join the leader on his line, trailing in, one in harmony, one talking the words, another grunting them out between clenched teeth, another throwing out a high, thin falsetto cry above the rest.

On the final syllable, the picks are descending and again they bite a chip out of the rock and again there is a grunting exhalation of breath:

*Carry it to my Captain—Huh!*

The picks whirl up together in the sunlight and down again, they ring on the earth together, with maybe one or two bouncing a couple of times in a sort of syncopation. When the leader comes to the third—

*Carry it to my Captain—*

he holds on to the word 'captain' as long as he can, looks around at the boss and grins; his buddies chuckle and relax for a moment, knowing that he is giving them a little rest; then, 'wham' the steel bites at the rock and the whole gang roars out the final line, so that the hill gives back the sound . . .

The Lomaxes add that 'the way of singing is unique, the way of using the voice and attacking the tones of the melody have to be heard to be understood.'

The unique way of singing to which the Lomaxes refer is probably a result of West African influence: an over-all blue tonality and an expressiveness due to the relatively free use of the human voice. European harmony is almost entirely absent and the melody is similar to the street-cry or field-holler. The rhythmic accenting in the voices as well as in the bouncing of the pickax is polyrhythmic. At the same time, the manner in which the gang responds to the leader—with a grunt, talking, a trace of harmony, and a falsetto cry—is a variation on the West African call-and-response pattern. Even the concealed humor has its African counterpart.

(Perhaps the best recorded work songs available today are found in Tony Schwartz' privately issued LP entitled 'If He Asks You Was I Laughing.' Other examples occur in Albums III and VIII of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, including 'Long John,' 'Jumpin' Judy,' and

'Hammer Ring.' Recorded by the Lomaxes in the deep South, these songs are authentic and demonstrably West African in style. The chain-gang songs of Josh White are a bit mannered but Leadbelly's work songs ring true. Leadbelly's recording of 'Looky Looky Yonder' and 'Black Betty' (the whip) illustrates something of the rhythmic complexity of the work song on a minor scale. In the first tune, the hammer falls on the first beat of a 2/4 march tempo; in the second tune, the hammer falls on an off-beat—the sixth in an 8/8 tempo.)

Because of the lowly and isolated role played by the work song in American life, it survived relatively untouched in the nooks and crannies of the rural Negro South, especially where men work together. At the same time, it offered a semi-concealed avenue of expression which encouraged the preservation of West African elements. To this day the work song is an important part of a disappearing reservoir of African musical qualities deep in the heart of the United States.

## 10 | The Blues

Although they did not come into public notice until after the First World War, the blues are at the center of the jazz tradition and date back to the earliest days of jazz. From 1917 on, blues, near-blues, and non-blues-called-blues penetrated our popular music through and through. Almost everyone, for example, knows W. C. Handy's 'St. Louis Blues.' The general public thinks of the blues, however, as any popular music that is slow and sad. Actually, they are a separate and distinct form of jazz, and when a musician says, 'Let's play the blues,' he means something quite specific.

With the exception of the rhythm, perhaps the most important single element in the blues is the cry or holler, which has come to characterize much of jazz. It is part and parcel of the blue note and blue tonality. The cry has been described by John W. Work of Fisk University as 'a fragmentary bit of yodel, half sung, half yelled':<sup>1</sup>

Approaching his house or that of his sweetheart in the evening, or sometimes out of sheer lonesomeness, he would emit his 'holler.' Listeners would say, 'Here comes Sam,' or 'Will Jackson's coming,' or 'I just heard Archie down the road' . . .

In these 'hollers' the idiomatic material found in the blues is readily seen; the excessive portament, the slow time, the

preference for the flattened third [or blue note], the melancholy type of tune, . . . many . . . could serve as lines of blues.

In the cry we have the basis of the ever-changing pitch in the melody of the blues.

In the Georgia Sea Islands, Lydia Parrish was fascinated by the same sound:<sup>2</sup>

In the old days, before Negroes rode to work in automobiles, they sang as they walked, and most of their tasks were lightened with song. One of my pleasantest memories is of hearing them singing in the early morning and at sundown, and—during the heat of the day—calling to each other across wide fields. The call was peculiar, and I always wondered how they came by such a strange form of vocal gymnastics, since I never heard a white person do anything like it.

She adds that these cries reminded her of a Bantu rain song, recorded in Africa, which had the same 'upward break in the voice.'

An early illustration of the process by which the cry was incorporated into a group song is furnished by F. L. Olmsted, who traveled in the South before the Civil War. He was sleeping in a railroad passenger car at the time:<sup>3</sup>

At midnight I was awakened by loud laughter, and, looking out, saw that the loading gang of negroes had made a fire, and were enjoying a right merry repast. Suddenly, one raised such a sound as I never heard before; a long, loud, musical shout, rising and falling, and breaking into falsetto, his voice ringing through the woods in the clear, frosty night air, like a bugle call. As he finished, the melody was caught up by another, and then, by several in chorus . . .

After a few minutes I could hear one urging the rest to come to work again, and soon he stepped towards the cotton bales, saying, 'Come, bredern, come; let's go at it; come now, eeho! roll away! eeho—eeho—weeioho—ill—and the rest taking it up as before, in a few moments they all had their shoul-

ders to a bale of cotton, and were rolling it up the embankment.

Here the cry leads first to group singing and then to a work song.

Experts have attempted to analyze the unusual manner of vocalization in the cry and holler. In their *Negro Workaday Songs*, Odum and Johnson print four detailed graphs of the sound waves of a holler, prepared by a phonographic process of recording. The editors are the first to admit that these sounds are unique and defy complete analysis, but they note an unusually warm vibrato and sudden changes of pitch. They conclude that 'the vocal chords must undergo a snap.'<sup>4</sup>

This 'snap' is what Harold Courlander calls 'the falsetto voice,' adding that it originated in West Africa. Professor Waterman, too, speaks of 'the custom of singing in falsetto . . . common (among Negroes) both in West Africa and in the New World.' Much more prolonged and complex than the cowboy's, or roisterer's, 'Yippee,' traces of the cry or holler can be heard in most of jazz. It exists virtually intact in the work song, the shouting spiritual, and above all, the blues.

Examples of cries or hollers can be heard in Album VIII of the Library of Congress recordings. ('Arwhoolie' is one of the most interesting since it employs falsetto, portamento, or sliding from note to note, and blue tonality; in fact, it is a blues without the rhythm and the European harmony.) Leadbelly recorded a similar holler which he called 'Ain't Goin' Down to the Well No Mo' (Musicraft 224). Identical melodic phrases occur on a 1947 recording by Chano Pozo, who belonged to a Nigerian cult in Havana.

The harmony employed in the blues is another matter. It is pretty clearly derived from European music although

colored by the blue tonality of the cry. At its simplest, the harmony of the blues consists of the three basic chords in our musical language. The same chords, for example, are used in the accompaniment to 'Yankee Doodle,' 'Silent Night,' and 'Swanee River.' These chords are technically known as the 'tonic,' the 'sub-dominant,' and the 'dominant'—in all keys—and you can hear them in the right order if you listen to the background of a simple version of 'Careless Love.'

How did the blues happen to adopt this harmony? It probably came from our religious music, which employed these chords. Says guitar-picker T-Bone Walker:<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the blues comes a lot from the church, too. The first time I ever heard a boogie-woogie piano was the first time I went to church. That was the Holy Ghost Church in Dallas, Texas. That boogie-woogie was a kind of blues, I guess.

'How Long Blues' is derived from a spiritual, says Rudi Blesh in *Shining Trumpets*, and the spirituals 'Precious Lord Hold My Hand' and 'Nobody's Fault but Mine' are essentially blues. Parallel examples also occur where the harmony and even part of the melody is retained. Thus, 'St. James Infirmary' owes much to the spiritual 'Hold On, Keep Your Hands on the Plow,' and the last chorus of 'St. Louis Blues' owes its melody to the exhortations of Brother Lazarus Gardner, Presiding Elder of the A.M.E. Church of Florence, Alabama, according to W. C. Handy. Here, again, we are close to the cry.

There were blues singers on recordings in 1955, however, who still did not employ European harmony. It is generally possible to date a blues style by the complexity of the harmony. Guitarist John Lee Hooker, whose recordings are made for the Negro trade exclusively, employs a drone which sounds very much like the skirl of a bagpipe and he says his grandfather played that way. His

rhythms, however, are very complicated. With Big Bill Broonzy it's a matter of pride not to employ European harmony, although he doesn't think of it in those terms:<sup>6</sup>

. . . for me to really sing the old blues that I learned in Mississippi I have to go back to my sound and not the right chords as the musicians have told me to make. They just don't work with the real blues . . . the blues didn't come out of no book and them real chords did . . . the real blues is played and sung the way you feel and no man or woman feels the same way every day . . .

Other favorites in 1955 such as Muddy Waters, Smokey Hogg, and Lil' Son Jackson employ some harmony, but often without any consistent plan.

This non-harmonic style is archaic and may well date back to pre-Civil War days. Wilder Hobson in his *American Jazz Music* suggests:<sup>7</sup>

. . . the blues may originally have consisted merely in the singing, over a steady, percussive rhythm, of lines of variable length, the length being determined by what phrase the singer had in mind, with equally variable pauses (the accompanying rhythm continuing) determined by how long it took the singer to think up another phrase.

With this early style, in other words, the singer didn't need a pre-arranged series of chords as long as he performed by himself.

When the blues became a group performance some pre-conceived plan was needed, for everyone had to agree on when to start and stop. Leadbelly furnishes an example of an intermediate stage. Performing alone on recordings, he sometimes disregards what have become the conventional chord 'changes' and the usual duration of each chord, strumming along until he remembers the words that come next. Perhaps he is searching his memory, but as long as he is alone it makes little difference. On the other hand,

when Leadbelly plays with a group he automatically adopts a common harmony and timing.

The form of the blues is a mixture. The over-all length and general proportions are derived from European harmony; the inner form is taken from the West African call-and-response pattern. As in the work song, which probably contributed to the formation of the blues, the call-and-response pattern came first and was employed intact. European harmony and the forms it favored came later and were absorbed gradually. In our own day, the European-derived form has become the most easily recognized characteristic of the blues.

The length of blues form varied originally, as we have seen, but today among jazzmen it has become fixed at 12 bars. These bars are divided into three equal parts, with a different chord for each. The words themselves illustrate this division:

I'm goin' down and lay my head on the railroad track,  
I'm goin' down and lay my head on the railroad track,  
When the train come along, I'm gonna snatch it back.

Roughly speaking, the time taken in singing the words of each line is a little more than one half of each of the three equal (musical) parts, which leaves considerable room for an instrumental response after each line. Here is the call-and-response pattern again, and Joe Smith's cornet accompaniment of Bessie Smith on 'Young Woman's Blues' is a classic example.

The unusual fact about this blues form is that it consists of three parts, instead of two or four. This stanza form is quite rare in English literature and may have originated with the American Negro. Like the ballad stanza, it furnishes a good vehicle for a narrative of any length. At the same time, it is more dramatic: the first two lines set the stage clearly by repetition and the third line delivers the

punch. The blues stanza is capsule communication, tailored for live performance among a participating, dancing audience.

The date of the first blues will probably never be known. The more we learn, the earlier it seems to have been. 'African songs of proverbial wit and ridicule were one likely source,' says Russell Ames, 'and African songs of pity and sorrow another.'<sup>8</sup> Old-timers in New Orleans, a few born as early as the 1860's, say 'the blues was here when I come.' Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, one of the greatest of blues singers, told Professor Work that she heard the blues in 1902 and sang them from then on. W. C. Handy reports that he heard the blues in 1903. Baby Dodds (born in 1894) says: 'The blues were played in New Orleans in the early days.' Jelly Roll Morton gives the impression that just about everyone within reach of a piano in New Orleans worked out his own version of the blues in a barrelhouse style that later became known as boogie-woogie. 'They couldn't play anything else,' he reports disparagingly.

Morton was inclined to look down on the blues—a perennial attitude—as crude and unpolished. At the same time, he made fine arrangements of the blues and played exquisite blues himself. In retrospect, it seems clear that Morton disapproved only of the boogie-woogie style of the blues, which is indeed archaic. For the blues form is simply a frame for the musical picture, a mold into which the jazzman pours his creative energy. The melody, harmony, and rhythm can become infinitely complicated, depending upon the performer's sophistication. Hence playing the blues is still an acid test for a jazzman.

Among musicians the use of the words, 'the blues,' to refer specifically to the 12-bar form came late in the day. Among music publishing houses this form was so unusual that W. C. Handy's 'Memphis Blues' (which may have

helped establish the pattern) had been turned down by several publishers because of its form before being issued in 1912. Count Basie, who played piano in New York City in 1925, told me that he does not remember hearing this use of the phrase until he arrived in Oklahoma City in 1926, when he met the vocalist Jimmy Rushing, who had been taught by an uncle from the deep South around 1915 that 'the blues means twelve bars.' When Jack Teagarden arrived in New York City much later (1927), he was the only known white musician who could sing the blues in an 'authentic' manner. It was not until the 1930's that recorded performances by Fats Waller, Artie Shaw, and a few others were first labeled—quite accurately—'The Blues.'

Although the popular market was flooded with highly inaccurate imitations of the blues before 1920, the real thing was more or less unknown and the spread of any one blues was slow. It took place, if at all, among Negroes. One focal point was the T.O.B.A. circuit (Theatre Owners and Bookers Association) which operated a chain of theaters for the Negro trade in the South. Sterling Brown's poem, 'Ma Rainey,' communicates the feeling of excitement that the arrival of a blues singer caused in those days. And whatever blues she sang, the people took them over as their own—thus, partially composed music became folk music overnight. At the same time, the difference between the blues and religious music was never sharp. Only the words differed in many cases, and sometimes even they were alike. We have recordings from the late 'twenties of Mamie Forehand and Blind Willie Johnson singing spirituals in the form of 12-bar blues. Similarly, the Reverend McGhee and his congregation recorded music in blues form as a shouting spiritual. In West Africa, as in the United States, there is little or no technical distinction between secular and religious music.

By 1920, phonograph companies discovered that there

was a market among Negroes for the blues. The first hit—but not the best—was Mamie Smith's 'Crazy Blues.' Bootleg copies sold for three times list price. A Negro undergraduate in a Northern university, now a well-known professor at Howard University, recalls buying a copy and playing it late at night with the curtains drawn. He knew that his uninitiated white classmates would consider it crude and vulgar.

During the 'twenties, a special category called 'Race Recordings' was issued for the Negro public. With the Depression, this market almost disappeared until 1945 when the large sales of Cecil Gant's 'I Wonder' made record companies sit up and take notice again. Categorized as 'Rhythm and Blues' in 1950, a hit sold about 100,000 copies and commercial white bands often recorded their own diluted versions afterwards. The next big step was the 'Rock and Roll' music of the 1955 period—simplified but rhythmic blues—which white youngsters en masse heard for the first time in a tasteless version of the real thing.

The mood of the blues is difficult to assess. Arriving after World War I, when our popular music was either sad and sentimental or glad and boisterous, the bittersweet blues mixture founded a new tradition. 'The blues singer,' says Professor Work, 'translates every happening into his own intimate inconvenience.' There is a stoic humor: 'I'm laughing,' says the blues singer, 'just to keep from crying,' or 'Got the blues, but I'm too damn mean to cry.' A few are desperate: 'I used to love you, but oh, God damn you now!' The language is deceptively simple. Beneath it all, there is a lean matter-of-fact skepticism that penetrates the florid façade of our culture like a knife.

The blues are still very much with us. Our popular music is increasingly permeated with blue tonality. Composers such as Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, and George Gershwin have been saturated in it. 'If there is

a national American form of song,' says Russell Ames, 'it is the blues.'<sup>9</sup> And the 12-bar blues are still at the heart of modern jazz. Duke Ellington's best compositions are usually transformations of the blues. The most influential of modern jazzmen, Charlie Parker, recorded more versions of the blues (under a variety of titles) than any other form. As long as improvisation is a vital element in jazz, the blues will probably be the prime form for its expression.

## 11

## Minstrelsy

Minstrelsy reigned supreme in the American entertainment world from about 1845 to 1900. Unlike the work song or the blues, it contributed no particularly outstanding characteristics to the development of jazz. Yet it is of vast importance to the history of jazz because it served as a vehicle for the spread of American Negro music. During its fifty-year reign, minstrelsy furnished an introduction to the general public of a type of entertainment based upon Negro elements of story, dance, and song. For minstrelsy educated the general ear, preparing the way for the introduction of jazz.

At its best, minstrelsy was more of a burlesque than a truthful imitation of Negro life. Its appeal was enormous, however, and it became a big business—joining forces with the music business and borrowing material from every conceivable source. In its heyday, minstrelsy featured, among other attractions, circus acrobats, Chinese giants, parodies of *Hamlet*, African villages, and always, the Negro. In turn it gave birth to vaudeville, burlesque (in the original meaning), and musical comedy. Three big minstrel companies were on tour in 1919 and small companies were still playing the South in 1955.

Why was minstrelsy so popular? The American public loved it, says the brilliant historian Constance Rourke, be-

cause it reflected their point of view. Minstrel players acted the role of Negroes with an air of comic triumph, irreverent wisdom, and an underlying note of rebellion. Perhaps the combination appealed to a practical people in a new country. It was no accident that minstrelsy was born during the unsettled era of Jacksonian Democracy and grew as the Abolitionist movement prospered.

Constance Rourke supports her conclusions with evidence. In her reading of early American almanacs, joke-books, theatrical posters, memoirs, travel accounts, tracts, sermons, and pamphlets, she found that the American people tended to think of the typical American as a Yankee peddler, a backwoodsman, or a Negro. (Just as we in 1955 thought of Wally Cox, Molly Berg, or Amos and Andy as typical Americans.) She concludes that, of these three types, 'none left a deeper imprint than the Negro in minstrelsy,' who provided a sympathetic symbol 'for a pioneer people who required resilience as a prime trait.'<sup>1</sup>

Minstrelsy began gradually enough. Before 1800, there were occasional solo performances by white men in black-face inserted between intermissions of plays. The general conception of the Negro appears to have been partly a carry-over from seventeenth-century England. In Aphra Behn's novelette *Oroonoko* (1688) and the popular play based upon it, the later stereotypes of the 'regal slave' of colonial fiction and the 'noble savage' of Rousseau were inextricably mixed. Neither bore any true resemblance to the American Negro, but the Abolitionists, for example, seemed to believe it.

By 1810, blackface impersonations with titles such as 'A Negro Boy' were being presented by clowns of sorts to the accompaniment of jigs and clogs. This was before the circus, as we know it, was organized. A little later, solo blackface acts with bone-clappers, tambourines, and banjos became popular. These instruments, which probably

have their prototypes in West Africa, had long been used by Negroes in the South and they became the customary instruments of minstrelsy. Essentially percussive, they helped to establish the rhythmic foundation of minstrel shows.

Using these instruments, among others, various acts were booked on rough-and-ready theatrical tours through the newly settled frontier country of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. The entertainers came into direct contact with the fiery camp meetings and the powerful music which played so large a part in frontier revivals. Negroes, as we have seen, were very active in these religious gatherings. So members of these touring shows, ever alert to discover new material, hit upon a mine of inspiration in the Negro and his folkways.

The man who may have struck the spark that ignited the minstrel era was raised in frontier territory. He was Thomas D. Rice, professionally known as Daddy 'Jim Crow' Rice. A professed eyewitness, Edmon S. Conner, recalls how it all began around the years 1828-9:<sup>2</sup>

N. M. Ludlow took a Summer company to Louisville. Among the members were Sol Smith . . . and Tom Rice. It was the first regular theatre in that city. Back of the theatre was a livery stable kept by a man named Crow. The actors would look into the stable yard from the theatre, and were particularly amused by an old decrepit negro, who used to do odd jobs for Crow. As was then usual with slaves, they called themselves after their owner, so that old Daddy had assumed the name of Jim Crow. He was very much deformed, the right shoulder being drawn high up, the left leg stiff and crooked at the knee, giving him a painful, but at the same time laughable limp. He used to croon a queer old tune with words of his own, and at the end of each verse would give a little jump, and when he came down he set his 'heel a-rockin''. He called it 'jumping Jim Crow.' The words of the refrain were:

'Wheel about, turn about,  
Do jis so,  
An' ebery time I wheel about,  
I jump Jim Crow!'

Rice watched him closely, and saw that here was a character unknown to the stage. He wrote several verses, changed the air somewhat, quickened it a good deal, made up exactly like Daddy, and sang it to a Louisville audience. They were wild with delight, and on the first night he was recalled twenty times.

One of several commentators on this incident, Conner's memory appears to be sharp, his observation keen. The words of the song reflect the close observation of animal life found in Negro folklore. A crow, for example, hops or jumps rather than walks. The identification with the color black adds another clue to its origin.

'Jump Jim Crow' became a tremendous hit. It swept this country and later became the greatest song of the century in London. Bayard Taylor, according to Wittke in *Tambo and Bones*, heard the tune sung by Hindu minstrels in Delhi. By 1840, blackface imitators of Daddy Rice—and, indirectly or directly, the Negro—were on every type of playbill in the country. Sometime in 1843, these various specialties were combined into one big show by the Virginia Minstrels in New York. E. P. Christy in the following year worked out the minstrel formula of presentation. Its success was amazing. Another company, Bryant's Minstrels, charging twenty-five cents admission, ran for sixteen uninterrupted years in New York City.

Although Negro minstrel troupes did not appear until after the Civil War, certain individual Negroes became famous before then. William Henry Lane (c. 1825-62), billed as 'Juba,' was universally conceded to be the greatest minstrel dancer.<sup>3</sup> In 1845 he actually received top billing with a white company. In two contests, he defeated

Jack Diamond, who was considered the best white dancer. Lane's specialty was an imitation of the steps of other well-known dancers topped by his own dance routine which always brought down the house.

In his *American Notes* (1842), Charles Dickens is said to be describing Juba.<sup>4</sup>

Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs—all sorts of legs and no legs—what is this to him?

In comparing Lane's dancing to the rhythms of 'fingers on a tambourine,' Dickens hits upon an important element in the world-wide appeal of minstrelsy.

More specifically, a critic in Liverpool compared Juba's dancing to the rhythms of the banjo and bones, adding that 'this youth is the delight and astonishment of all who witness his extraordinary dancing; to our mind he dances demisemi, semi, and quavers, as well as the slower steps.'<sup>5</sup> (A 'quaver' is the British word for our eighth note and a 'demisemi' is  $1/32$  of a whole note, next to the smallest rhythmic unit our system of notation uses.) English audiences were hearing, seeing, and enjoying much more complicated dance rhythms than were common in Europe.

Of course, there was more to minstrelsy than the complex rhythms. Another critic in the *Theatrical Times* (August 1848) tried to explain it:<sup>6</sup>

The performances of this young man are far above the common performances of the mountebanks who give imitations of American and Negro character; there is an ideality in what he does that makes his efforts at once grotesque and poetical, without losing sight of the reality of the representation.

Separated by the Atlantic Ocean from the birthplace of minstrelsy, the British press was in a position to analyze the phenomenon a little more objectively. In this case, the critic had seen Juba—not the usual white imitator—and a significant difference was apparent to him.

A blending had taken place, and minstrel music and dance were something new under the sun. Perhaps William Makepeace Thackeray expresses its spirit most clearly:<sup>7</sup>

I heard a humorous balladist not long ago, a minstrel with wool on his head and an ultra-Ethiopian complexion, who performed a negro ballad that I confess moistened these spectacles in a most unexpected manner. I have gazed at thousands of tragedy queens dying on the stage, and expiring in appropriate blank verse, and I never wanted to wipe them. They have looked up, be it said, at many scores of clergymen without being dimmed, and behold! a vagabond with a corked face and a banjo sings a little song, strikes a wild note, which sets the heart thrilling with happy pity.

The 'wild note' may have been descended from a field-holler. For the appeal of this music was real and lasting. Whatever the mixed impulses beneath Thackeray's emotional response, he and millions of others were moved by minstrelsy.

The influence of minstrelsy in England went deep. Years later, 'English clowns, such as Majiltons and Hanlon-Lees, returned to whiteface,' says Marion Winter in *Chronicles of the American Dance*, 'but kept certain characteristics of blackface performers—the manic gaiety, he-who-gets-slapped apprehensions, and dance acrobatics—evolving thereby a slightly macabre, almost surrealist personage.'<sup>8</sup> Charlie Chaplin, for example, owes something to the same tradition. 'Christies' became the British name for minstrel shows, after the famous impresario E. P. Christy, and the hero of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

(1916) speaks of taking the evening off and going to a 'Christy' (cf. also 'The Dead' in James Joyce's *Dubliners*).

Back in the United States, minstrelsy spread together with the expanding frontier. During the Gold Rush of 1849, it reached the mining camps and mushroom towns of California where, a little later, minstrel troupes featured spirituals as well as camp-meeting songs with huge success. In the early 'fifties, for example, a young dancer named Ralph Keeler was touring with a minstrel company on a Mississippi showboat: '... we steamed thousands of miles on the Western and Southern rivers,' he writes. 'We went, for instance, the entire navigable lengths of the Cumberland and Tennessee.'<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion, Keeler and a minstrel troupe started in New Orleans on a showboat which paddled north, while they gave performances along the way wherever an audience could be found. They even played prisons, perhaps entertaining guitar-picking forerunners of Leadbelly: 'From motives of curiosity, charity, and advertisement combined, we always visited the state prisons ... and sang and played to the prisoners.' In his wide-ranging travels, Keeler must have influenced and been influenced by a great variety of American Negro music.

After the Civil War, minstrelsy boomed. The financial panic of '57 had had little effect on its rapid growth, and the post-bellum organization of Negro troupes, such as the Georgia Minstrels in 1865, further stimulated the trade. Horace Weston, Billy Kersands, Sam Lucas, James Bland (composer of 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny'), Billy Speed, the Bohee brothers, and many other Negro performers became famous in the United States. These men all had white managers and played in blackface. Many of them toured Europe with Haverley's European Minstrels. James Bohee, for example, gave banjo lessons to the Prince of Wales. By the 'nineties, the burnt-cork make-up was

dropped and three crack Negro troupes were touring the country: Hicks and Sawyer Minstrels, Richards and Pringle Minstrels, and McCabe and Young Minstrels.

Based upon Negro characteristics of story, dance, and song, the minstrel show presented endless opportunities for the use of American Negro music and related elements. The formula of presentation consisted of three more-or-less unrelated parts: the show proper, the olio, and sometimes a parody playlet. The first part, or show proper, began with the usual half circle of players with the end-men and interlocutor cracking jokes and doing their various specialties. It ended with the Walk Around, a grand finale in which everyone joined.

The Walk Around, at the height of minstrelsy, was simply the cakewalk. Couples promenaded grandly with a high kickstep, waving canes, doffing hats, and bowing low. The cakewalk, as Shephard Edmunds testifies in *They All Played Ragtime*, originated on the plantation: 'They did a take-off on the high manners of the white folks in the "big house," but their masters, who gathered around to watch the fun, missed the point.'<sup>10</sup> (It may also be that the Walk Around owes something to the ring-shout in origin.) This finale of the first part was enlivened by Negro song and dance. Dan Emmett, a white composer and impresario, always insisted that the Walk Around be performed in as authentic a Negro manner as possible. And it was accompanied by ragtime.

The second part, or olio (a word derived from the Spanish *olla*, meaning mixture), consisted of a series of solo acts that later evolved into variety or vaudeville. It too was usually climaxed by 'a genuine, hilarious darkey "hoe-down,"' as Wittke writes, 'in which every member of the company did a dance at the center of the stage, while the others sang and vigorously clapped their hands to emphasize the rhythm.'<sup>11</sup> This custom of circling a solo dancer

and clapping encouragement survives to this day and may be seen any night at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem.

The hoe-down incorporated a variety of American Negro elements, from hand-clapping and foot-patting to characteristics of ring games and shouting spirituals. Considerable rhythmic complexity was built up by the bones, tambourines, and banjos, and the call-and-response pattern dominated the performance:

Darkies hear dat banjo ring,  
Yoe! Ha! Yoe!  
Listen to the fiddle sing,  
Yoe! Ha! Yoe!  
Dee dah doo dah dum,  
Aha! Aha! . . .

As usual, the words are unimportant and simply serve to embellish the roll of the rhythm.

The third part, or parody playlet, often as not consisted of a burlesque of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the most frequently performed work in the American theater. (*Macbeth* was presented as *Bad Breath, the Crane of Chowder*.) Yet even in this part of the show, groups of Jubilee Singers were often introduced at various points, singing 'plantation' songs. In 1875, for example, the 'North Carolinians' were similarly presented at Case Hall in Cleveland. They were described as 'a company of genuine field hands from the Southern plantations, male and female, who were formerly slaves. Their music is . . . weird, grotesque, but generally melodious . . .'<sup>12</sup> In this way, camp-meeting songs and even field-hollers and work songs obtained a wide hearing.

By the 'nineties, minstrelsy was suffering from galloping elephantiasis. Buffalo Bill's agent, Nate Salsbury, produced a spectacle called 'Black America' at Ambrose Park in Brooklyn, New York. It included a Negro village with

cabins, mules, washtubs (probably *not* used as musical instruments), a meetinghouse, and a preacher. Introduced by 'African tribal episodes and a war dance,' the show featured a choir of five hundred voices recruited from 'the farm and mill hands of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida.' This was in 1894. In 1902, A. W. Martin produced 'a spectacular scene of Voodoo worship' in New York City as an intermission between the acts of a comic parody of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Wildly unauthentic as these shows must have been, they and their music made a deep impression on the public.

The penetration into our popular culture—by way of minstrelsy—of American Negro musical characteristics can be documented by certain tunes. This is unusual, because the main contribution of the Negro consists in the intangibles of performance, fleeting improvisations, and extemporaneous embellishments. Nevertheless, many of the songs of Stephen Foster show a strong camp-meeting influence. Foster was brought up by a mulatto nurse and as a child learned to love Negro music. His most enduring songs, which have become part of our folk music, are of the minstrel type with lyrics in Negro dialect such as 'Swanee River,' 'Old Black Joe,' 'My Old Kentucky Home,' and 'Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground.' ('Old Folks at Home' has the same three opening notes as the Negro spiritual 'Deep River,' and the same early jump of an octave. 'Camptown Races' owes much to 'Lord, Remember Me' and 'Roll Jordan Roll,' and so on.)

Another famous composer, Dan Emmett, used the Jordan theme again and again in his minstrel music. The composer of 'Dixie,' Emmett was white and claimed credit for the hit 'Old Dan Tucker.' The original words, however, describe a Negro and (as Constance Rourke points out) the beast-fable lyrics, the call-and-response pattern, and the tune itself betray strong Negro influence. It is probable

that many minstrel hits, just as 'Jump Jim Crow,' were taken over wholly or in part from the Negro. As usual, white men were in a better position to cash in on them. And yet it was a Negro composer, James Bland, who wrote 'In the Evening by the Moonlight,' 'Oh Dem Golden Slippers,' and 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny.' Here, the contribution is direct but the Negro musical characteristics are few.

On the other hand, 'Zip Coon,' better known today as 'Turkey in the Straw,' has been traced back to a Mississippi river-boat breakdown, or dance, called 'Natchez under the Hill.' In an old version, it tells the story of an old Negro. Another minstrel hit, 'Clare de Kitchen,' was apparently the creation of Negro firemen on the river boats. Later successes such as 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!,' 'The Bully Song,' and 'A Hot Time in the Old Town' are supposed to have originated in a famous Negro cabaret in St. Louis named *Babe Connor's*. In most cases, of course, the amount of American Negro qualities in any one song varied with the interpretation.

Minstrelsy and the beginnings of jazz collided in the 'nineties. Besides carrying American Negro music to the public, minstrelsy also served as a training ground for early jazzmen. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that many minstrel musicians simply turned to ragtime and then to jazz as minstrelsy declined. The jazz musician Jack Laine was leading a minstrel band in and around New Orleans in 1895. Stale Bread (Emile Lacoume) and his Spasm Band joined Doc Malney's Minstrels in the following year. 'All the minstrel shows, like the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and Silas Green and the Georgia Minstrels,' says New Orleans guitarist Danny Barker, 'used New Orleans musicians year in and year out.'

W. C. Handy had joined *Mahara's Minstrels* in 1896 and in the next year, which saw the end of the depression

and election of McKinley, became cornet soloist and leader. It had been the custom since about 1850 for newly arrived minstrel troupes to put on a parade to stir up interest in the show to follow—a device also used by the circus. In his *Father of the Blues*, Handy writes:<sup>13</sup>

We used the heaviest works of W. P. Chambers, C. W. Dalbey and C. L. Barnhouse; even the stiff composition *Alvin Joslin* by Pettee was not beyond us. It was only when we were lip-weary that we eased off on the light, swingy marches of R. B. Hall and John Philip Sousa.

Mahara's was a famous troupe and the musicians prided themselves on their up-to-date classical repertory. A Sousa march, however, when played with a little verve, can come very close to jazz.

Later, in the public square, the band would play 'Bruder Gardner's Picnic,' a medley of Stephen Foster hits. As a specialty, they might perform 'The Musicians' Strike' to the dismay and then delight of the innocent townspeople: one by one the musicians would quarrel with each other and desert the band, only to re-assemble around the corner and suddenly 'cut loose with one of the most sizzling tunes of the day,' as Handy says, 'perhaps "Creole Belles," "Georgia Camp Meeting," or "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight."'<sup>14</sup> At this point, the presence of a few potential jazzmen was essential and the sound may well have approximated the music of a New Orleans marching band.

By the turn of the century, jazzmen could be found in almost any minstrel troupe. The old-time pianist, Clarence Williams, ran away from home at the age of twelve to join a show. The great blues singer, Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, was one of the star attractions in Rainey's Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Jelly Roll Morton was working with the McCabe and Young Minstrels in 1910—they say he was the world's

worst comedian—and James P. Johnson played ragtime with an amateur minstrel group at Public School 69 in New York City. Trumpeter Bunk Johnson, rediscovered in the 'forties, was on tour with various minstrel shows from 1903, when he joined Holecamp's Georgia Smart Set, until 1931, when he went back to work in the fields. And even jazzmen of more recent years, such as Hot Lips Page and Lester Young, played with minstrel shows when they were first starting out. 'A lot of men,' observes drummer Jo Jones, quoted in *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 'came up through the minstrel shows.'

Minstrelsy, however, was doomed. It was meeting stiff competition from the Harrigan and Hart shows (spurred by importations of Gilbert and Sullivan), vaudeville, cabarets, the early movies, and by 1917, from jazz itself. The minstrel dance was siphoned off into social dancing by the dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle and the fox trot. Old-time minstrel men blamed one thing. Back in 1902, when the successful impresario Lew Dockstader was asked why minstrelsy was slipping, he replied that the essential Negro qualities had become dated and lost.<sup>15</sup> Time and again, experienced observers make the same point: the contribution of the American Negro, directly and indirectly, gave minstrelsy its vitality. When the basic Negro qualities became diluted and the stock characters lost any relation to real life, minstrelsy died.

American popular entertainment is still riddled with debts to minstrelsy. Joseph Jefferson, Edwin Booth, Chauncey Olcott, and Al Jolson were minstrel men. So were Fred Stone, Benny Field, and Eddie Cantor. The dancing of Bill Robinson and others derived from minstrelsy. Minstrel tunes even appear on the Hit Parade. The Andrews Sisters' 'Dance with a Dolly,' for example, was entitled 'Lubly Fan' when it was composed for a minstrel show by John Hodges in the 1840's. More recently,

loyal alumni of Cornell discovered that their Alma Mater song was originally a minstrel tune having little to do with 'Cayuga's Waters.'

The effect of minstrelsy upon American culture is almost inestimable. The basis upon which the Negro built, of course, was European and American popular music. Fiddle tunes, jigs, hornpipes, and square dances were standard fare, but they were all gradually transformed by the American Negro manner and style of performance. The blending was broad and lasting if not very deep. In the process, minstrelsy once and for all acquainted the general public with something of the music of the American Negro.

## 12

## The Spiritual

Spirituals have been a cherished part of our musical culture for nearly a hundred years. Who has not heard and enjoyed 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'? And spirituals, or something very much like them, were probably sung during the Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century. In contrast to minstrelsy, they present the Negro as a thoughtful human being, and reveal some of his aspirations to those who care to listen. They were an early and impressive means for making the United States, and indeed the whole world, conscious of the Negro and his music. The process also helped make familiar something of the rhythmic idiom and, especially, the blue tonality which became important to jazz.

Spirituals came to the attention of the public after the Civil War. Northerners such as Colonel T. W. Higginson, who had led a Negro regiment, wrote about them in the *Atlantic Monthly*. They were included in the first collection of Negro tunes, *Slave Songs of the United States*, edited by Allen, Ware, and Garrison in 1867. Then, in 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers began their famous tours at home and abroad, establishing spirituals once and for all as respectable music.<sup>1</sup>

How old are the spirituals? Professor John W. Work of Fisk University argues that some of them go back before

1800. He points out, for example, that a group of Negro freedmen from Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina migrated in 1824 to Haiti, where 'Roll Jordan Roll' is still sung. The emigrants must have taken the song with them and so, allowing time for its composition and growth in the United States, Professor Work feels that this particular spiritual dates back at least to the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup> Similar examples in the Bahamas indicate 1780 or earlier.

The religious music of the American Negro ranges wide and deep. In addition to spirituals, it includes other kinds or types such as the ring-shout, the song-sermon, the jubilee, and the gospel song (the label 'anthem' is a general term which is applied to any church singing). Each of these has its own characteristics and is still being sung in various parts of the United States today.

Professor Work divides this music into three types, according to the way the melody is handled: (1) the call-and-response or back-and-forth melody (ring-shout, song-sermon, and—sometimes—jubilee and gospel song); (2) the short, rhythmic melody (gospel song—usually—and jubilee—sometimes); and (3) the long, sustained melody (spiritual). On the other hand, Professor W. L. James of Spelman College, Atlanta, told me that he divides this music, according to mood and other qualities, from enthusiastic rejoicing (jubilee) to deep reverence (spiritual). There is also a vast difference, of course, between the folk and concert manner of performance of any one type.

What we know as the spiritual is really a very rare type. Probably the greatest number of religious songs of the American Negro employ the call-and-response pattern and have a cheerful mood. But the spirituals with which the general public is most familiar, such as 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen,' 'Go Down Moses,' and 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' do not usually employ the call-and-re-

sponse pattern. They are the least African and most European of all Afro-American religious music, and—perhaps for this reason—to a great many people they represent the crowning glory of Negro music.

Where did the spirituals come from? There are two diametrically opposed views. The first is that the spiritual was created out of nowhere by a sort of spontaneous combustion of the Negro's genius; the second is that the spiritual was taken entirely from European music, especially the hymn, since there could be no other source. Each of these views is probably half right. But they both fail to take into account the existence of an African musical tradition and the blending with European music that was bound to occur.

A third and middle-of-the-road view is that the spiritual is a varying mixture of European and African music. There was plenty of reason for such a merging. Behind the Negro spirituals, as Gilbert Chase observes, was a 'century-long tradition of "ecstatic delight in psalmody."<sup>3</sup> The African arriving in the United States was not influenced by hymns sung in fashionable churches by city dwellers. He was attracted to the folk hymn, which started in early New England but was soon followed in the towns by a more modern style with which most Northerners are still familiar. The folk hymn survived only in rural districts.

Certain occasional elements in the style of the folk hymn made it attractive to the West African. As mentioned in the chapter on the Great Awakening, one style of folk hymn is sung by ear with each singer improvising as many embellishments as he pleases. Slurs, glides, flourishes, and turns are expected of everybody. Added to this was the custom of 'lining out,' whereby the preacher reads the words before the congregation sings them. This custom started in the British Isles and lasted over three hun-

dred years, even when the congregation had learned the words by heart. It became an organic part of the music and dovetailed neatly with the African custom of employing the call-and-response pattern.

Further, this folk style of singing hymns dispensed with all but accidental harmony. Everybody sang the tune—in unison. Nobody, however, sang exactly the same notes and the result was heterophony, or different versions of the same melody. Similarly, when Yankee singing masters invaded rural areas with their 'fasola' and 'shape-note' systems of reading music, they taught folk hymns that consisted of part-singing rather than conventional harmonizing. Everybody had an interesting part, for the idea was to move horizontally rather than vertically. To the West African only blue notes and rhythm were lacking.

We know little enough about the West African musical tradition, but one example of it, the circle dance, has survived in this country as the ring-shout. This is the dance, described in Chapter One, which happened not to violate Protestant prohibitions against dancing and drumming. Anthropologist Ernest Borneman calls it 'a straight adaptation of African ceremonialism to Christian liturgy.'<sup>4</sup>

Describing the ring-shout, Alan Lomax writes:<sup>5</sup>

We have seen 'shouts' in Louisiana, in Texas, in Georgia, and in the Bahamas; we have seen vaudou dancing in Haiti; we have read accounts of similar rites in works upon Negro life in other parts of the Western hemisphere.

All share basic similarities: (1) the song is 'danced' with the whole body, with hands, feet, belly, and hips; (2) the worship is, basically, a dancing-singing phenomenon; (3) the dancers always move counter-clockwise around the ring; (4) the song has the leader-chorus form, with much repetition, with a focus on rhythm rather than on melody, that is, with a form that invites and ultimately enforces cooperative group activity; (5) the song continues to be repeated for sometimes

more than an hour, steadily increasing in intensity and gradually accelerating, until a sort of mass hypnosis ensues . . .

This shout pattern . . . is demonstrably West African in origin.

In 1934, John and Alan Lomax recorded an excellent ring-shout and song-sermon in Jennings, Louisiana, entitled 'Run Old Jeremiah.'

In the ring-shout, we find the basic combination of qualities that appears throughout the music of the American Negro. Lomax stresses the fundamental importance of the rhythm and the consistent use of the call-and-response pattern. He might also have commented upon the melody, which employs the blue tonality of the cry. All of these qualities—variously diluted—occur in most of the religious music of the Negro, as well as in the work song, the blues, minstrelsy, ragtime, and the wide expanse of jazz.

The ring-shout had been noted and described as early as Civil War days. A rare description by H. G. Spaulding appeared in the *Continental Monthly* as early as 1863:<sup>6</sup>

At the 'praise meetings' on the plantations, one of the elders usually presides . . . Passages of Scripture are quoted from memory, and the hymns, which constitute the principal feature of the meeting, are deaconed off as at church . . . After the praise meeting is over, there usually follows the very singular and impressive performance of the 'Shout' or religious dance of the negroes. Three or four, standing still, clapping their hands and beating time with their feet, commence singing in unison one of the peculiar shout melodies, while the others walk round in a ring, in single file, joining also in the song. Soon those in the ring leave off their singing, the others keeping it up the while with increased vigor, and strike into the shout step, observing most accurate time with the music. This step is sometimes halfway between a shuffle and a dance, as difficult for an uninitiated person to describe as to imitate. At the end of each stanza of the song the dancers stop short

with a slight stamp on the last note, and then, putting the other foot forward, proceed through the next verse. They will often dance to the same song for twenty or thirty minutes, once or twice, perhaps, varying the monotony of their movement by walking for a little while and joining in the singing. The physical exertion, which is really very great, as the dance calls into play nearly every muscle of the body, seems never to weary them in the least, and they frequently keep up a shout for hours, resting only for brief intervals between the different songs. Yet in trying to imitate them, I was completely tired out in a very short time. The children are the best dancers, and are allowed by their parents to have a shout at any time, though, with the adults, the shout always follows a religious meeting, and none but church members are expected to join . . .

The negroes never indulge in it when, for any reason, they feel down-hearted or sad at their meetings. The shout is a simple outburst and manifestation of religious fervor . . .

The tunes to which these songs are sung, are some of them weird and wild—‘barbaric madrigals’—while others are sweet and impressive melodies. The most striking of their barbaric airs it would be impossible to write out, but many of their more common melodies are easily caught upon being heard a few times.

Another and better-known description of the ‘praise meeting’ appeared in *The Nation* four years later.<sup>7</sup>

This is a ceremony which the white clergymen are inclined to discountenance, and even of the colored elders some of the more discreet try sometimes to put on a face of discouragement; and, although if pressed for Biblical warrant for the shout, they generally seem to think, ‘he in de Book,’ or, ‘he dere-da in Matchew,’ still it is not considered blasphemous or improper if ‘de chillen’ and ‘dem young gal’ carry it on in the evening for amusement’s sake, and with no well-defined intention of ‘praise.’ But the true ‘shout’ takes place on Sundays, or on ‘praise’ nights through the week, and either in the praise-house or in some cabin in which a regular religious

meeting has been held. Very likely more than half the population of the plantation is gathered together; let it be in the evening, and a light-wood fire burns red before the door of the house and on the hearth. For some time one can hear, though at a good distance, the vociferous exhortation or prayer of the presiding elder or of the brother who has a gift that way and who is not ‘on the back seat’—a phrase the interpretation of which is ‘under the censure of the church authorities for bad behavior’—and at regular intervals one hears the elder ‘deaconing’ [i.e. lining out] a hymn-book hymn, which is sung two lines at a time, and whose wailing cadences, borne on the night air, are indescribably melancholy. But the benches are pushed back to the wall when the formal meeting is over, and old and young, men and women, sprucely-dressed young men, grotesquely half-clad field-hands—the women generally with gay handkerchiefs twisted about their heads and with short skirts, boys with tattered shirts and men’s trousers, young girls bare-footed—all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the ‘sperichil’ is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration. Sometimes he dances silently, sometimes as he shuffles he sings the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is also sung by the dancers. But more frequently a band, composed of some of the best singers and of tired shouters, stand at the side of the room to ‘base’ the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees. Song and dance are alike extremely energetic, and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night, the monotonous thud, thud of the feet prevents sleep within half a mile of the praise-house.

Although the reporter refers to this music as a ‘sperichil,’ it is a far cry from the kind that John Charles Thomas, for example, sings on the concert stage.

The vast difference between this ring-shout (with per-

spiring dancers shuffling in a circle while chanting back and forth) and the concert spiritual illustrates the full range of American Negro religious music. How did the blending of European and African music produce two such different forms? One is, of course, a dance and the other is a song. Thus the ring-shout, unlike the spiritual, has a driving rhythm but lacks the sustained melody as well as the harmony.

One general trend seems clear. If we start with a more-or-less African example such as the ring-shout, we can see that as the rhythm dwindled, the melody lengthened and harmony developed. This process is enormously complicated by the West African tradition of improvisation, augmented by the free style of the folk hymn—no one melody is sacred; it can always be changed by spontaneous embellishments. Thus, although many spirituals are written down and ring-shouts generally are not, it is conceivable that the former's sustained melody could have emerged momentarily from a ring-shout. The evolution is fluid, proceeding at different speeds in different mixtures, with much depending upon the performer.

Take the evolution of melody. The song-sermon used at camp meetings is only a short step from the ring-shout. The fiery preaching supplies the call; the shouting of the congregation adds the response. The preacher may use the 'zoning' style (field-holler and cry) or the 'gravy' style (work-song grunt) or a combination of both. It is no longer a dance but a singing sermon. The melody assumes added importance because it carries the words, the immediate message. In this transition, the flowing rhythm and the blue tonality might remain unchanged but the melody tends to crystallize. The preacher improvises the melody, within traditional limits, but now it carries a new meaning for which the congregation listens. (There may be dancing, although less commonly so.) Soon the preacher finds cer-

tain melodic phrases that he likes and repeats them. (The parallel to a jazzman playing the same tune over and over again and settling upon certain figures is precise.) The song-sermon is on its way toward a set and probably longer melody. The increased length leads to overlapping and incidental harmony, while the entire process is hastened by the powerful and all-pervasive influence of European music, leading to further complexity in almost everything but rhythm.

The song-sermon is flourishing mightily today. The evangelical religions—white following Negro examples—perform it regularly. It can also be heard at the services of the various Sanctified sects in any good-sized American town. In big cities, it can be heard on the radio. Recordings of song-sermons have been selling to the colored trade since the mid-'twenties and were selling better than ever in the 'fifties. The connection with jazz is direct. 'Lots of people think I'm going to be a preacher when I quit this business, because of the way I sing the blues,' says T-Bone Walker. 'They say it sounds like a sermon.' Again, explaining why vibra-harpist Milt Jackson has such a fine sense of rhythm, Dizzy Gillespie observed seriously: 'Why, man, he's sanctified!' Jackson grew up (as did Gillespie) near a Sanctified Church in Detroit.

The same process applies to secular songs of the American Negro. On the trail of the spiritual and its origins, J. M. McKim noted in 1862:<sup>8</sup>

I asked one of these blacks—one of the most intelligent of them . . . where they got these songs. 'Dey make 'em, sah.' 'How do they make them?' After a pause, evidently casting about for an explanation, he said: 'I'll tell you, it's dis way. My master call me up, and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it, and is sorry for me. When dey come to de praise-meeting dat night dey sing about

it. Some's very good singers and know how; and dey work it in—work it in, you know, till they get it right; and dat's de way.'

This is still the ring-shout—to be a 'good singer and know how' means, in part, a mastery of the call-and-response form—but now the words have become very important and, along with them, the melody. This is the birth of a topical song.

Colonel Higginson, who was puzzled by 'the mode of composition' of the spiritual, had a similar experience which he described in the *Atlantic Monthly*:<sup>9</sup>

... we . . . know nothing of the mode of composition. Allen Ramsay says of the Scotch songs, that, no matter who made them, they were soon attributed to the minister of the parish whence they sprang. And I always wondered, about these, whether they had always a conscious and definite origin in some leading mind or whether they grew by gradual accretion, in an almost unconscious way. On this point I could get no information, though I asked many questions, until at last one day when I was being rowed across from Beaufort to Ladies' Island, I found myself, with delight, on the actual trail of a song. One of the oarsmen, a brisk young fellow, not a soldier, on being asked for his theory of the matter, dropped out a coy confession. 'Some good sperituals,' he said, 'are start jess out o' curiosity. I bin a-raise a sing, myself once.'

My dream was fulfilled, and I had traced out, not the poem alone, but the poet. I implored him to proceed.

'Once we boys,' he said, 'went for tote some rice, and de nigger driver, he keep a-callin' on us: and I say, "O, de ole nigger driver!" Den anudder said, "Fust t'ing my mammy tole me was, not'in' so bad as nigger-driver." Den I made a sing, just puttin' a word and den anudder word.' Then he began singing, and the men, after listening a moment, joined in the chorus as if it were an old acquaintance, though they evidently had never heard it before.

I saw how easily a new 'sing' took root among them.

Again we have the creation of a topical song in a tradition which assumes an easy familiarity with the call-and-response pattern. The only really new element is the words, which were improvised to fit the old form. At the same time, the melody is probably beginning to lengthen and crystallize, a tendency strongly reinforced by contact with European tunes.

The next step in this blending, which produced both ring-shout and spiritual, is the jubilee. Jubilees are both cheerful and rhythmic, usually announcing some sort of good news. Perhaps the best-known example today is 'When the Saints Go Marching In.' It has a definite melody but, at the same time, it lends itself admirably to the call-and-response form. In fact, most people would probably prefer it chanted back and forth—the tune clearly has more life when sung this way. It can, however, be sung either way and still be readily recognized.

As the melody lengthens and establishes itself, the call-and-response form must be modified. In the case of certain spirituals, such as 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' and 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen,' this form is usually dropped altogether because the melody itself is featured at a slower tempo. The step from jubilee to spiritual, therefore, is quite short and frequently seems to be created by the thoughtful mood of the interpreter. For the spiritual is traditionally a music of sadness and deep conviction, a mood that would be destroyed by the call-and-response form and its exciting rhythms.

In semi-improvised music (the form is set), the feeling of the performer is all-important; everything depends upon his interpretation. This makes for an incredible fluidity in the evolutionary process. Thus, we have cultural feedbacks—the melodies of jubilees and spirituals, for example, are still used in the deep South as musical points of departure for ring-shouts. Everything that might

interfere with the rhythm disappears: the melody is whittled away, the harmony is disregarded, the words become almost unintelligible. The whole performance moves 'back' in the direction of the West African circle dance, which it closely resembles. On the other hand, the same jubilee or spiritual on the concert stage has a set melody and careful harmony. At this point it is almost wholly European.

Searching for the origin of 'fixed' melodies leads inevitably to the 'spontaneous combustion' theory. In some cases they may have been improvised on the spur of the moment, although this improvisation takes place along traditional lines within a set form. Early researchers were astounded by the number and variety of melodies that might crop up during the singing of any one song. Laboring to write them all down while admitting 'our system of notation is inadequate,' these pioneers managed to capture a few tunes—jubilees perhaps, parts of song-sermons, and even snatches from ring-shouts—that, in spite of an added arrangement by the notator, were fine melodies in their own right and retained a hint of the original, bluetinged magic. In this way spirituals were born.

The spiritual has been defined in R. W. Gordon's *The Carolina Low Country* as 'a tune—never twice the same—accompanied by not over two standard verses—not the same—followed by as many other verses as the singer happens to remember.' This is a vague but realistic definition. Before the Fisk Jubilee Singers went on the road in 1871, for example, there were two or three separate melodies that employed the words of 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot.' The director of the choir selected the particular melody that we all know today. Denominational schools, founded by wealthy and cultured Northerners for poor, uneducated Negroes, played a key role in the spread of the spiritual. The choir director of a Negro college has a strong

and natural impulse to master the subtleties of European music and adopt them wholesale. Unfortunately, if a ring-shout is made to sound like a Northern version of 'Rock of Ages,' a great deal of vitality is lost. But students fresh from the plantation fields were members of the various jubilee groups so a bit of the blueness and rhythm was bound to survive.

The growth of harmony is as uncertain as that of the melody. Until the latter is pretty well established, no set harmony is likely to accompany it. The first appearance of regular harmony in the religious music of the Negro probably occurred in the touched-up transcriptions of early white collectors or the out-and-out arrangements of various choir conductors in Southern schools. The example of European music was, of course, overpowering, and the harmony of the Protestant hymn was superimposed upon everything.

Living on a Georgia plantation in 1839, the actress and musician Fanny Kemble wrote in her diary:<sup>10</sup>

My daily voyages up and down the river have introduced me to a great variety of new musical performances of our boatmen, who invariably, when the rowing is not too hard, moving up or down with the tide, accompany the stroke of their oars with the sound of their voices. I told you formerly that I thought I could trace distinctly some popular national melody with which I was familiar in almost all their songs; but I have been quite at a loss to discover any such foundation for many that I have heard lately, and which have appeared to me extraordinarily wild and unaccountable. The way in which the chorus strikes in with the burden, between each phrase of the melody chanted by a single voice, is very curious and effective, especially with the rhythm of the rowlocks for accompaniment. The high voices all in unison, and the admirable time and true accent with which their responses are made, always make me wish that some great musical composer could hear these semisavage performances.

This emphasis upon the 'time and true accent' (or rhythm), and the mention of 'responses' make it clear that she heard music in the call-and-response form. Notice, however, that the slaves are singing 'all in unison.' In other words, there is no harmony; everybody is singing his own version of the melody, in the manner of a folk hymn.

And yet Fanny Kemble found the music thrilling: 'extraordinarily wild and unaccountable!' Why? Because each individual is singing his own version of the melody—blue notes and all—with 'admirable time' or a fine sense of rhythm. The result is a free but rhythmically complicated heterophony, or combination of voices setting up different melodic lines at the same time. Add to this the exotic flavoring of the cry and the result is an unintentional but occasional harmony that might well fascinate (or repel) a person reared in the conventional European tradition.

This kind of unison singing was considered 'the true plantation style' even by the Virginia Minstrels, organized in 1843. (The first four-part harmonizations of minstrel songs did not appear until 1848.) Unison singing of religious music is carefully described by the editors of *Slave Songs* (1867), who found it puzzling but thrilling:<sup>11</sup>

There is no singing in *parts*, as we understand it, and yet no two appear to be singing the same thing—the leading singer starts the words of each verse, often improvising, and the others, who 'base' him, as it is called, strike in with the refrain, or even join in the solo, when the words are familiar.

When the 'base' begins, the leader often stops, leaving the rest of his words to be guessed at, or it may be that they are taken up by one of the other singers. And the 'basers' themselves seem to follow their own whims, beginning when they please and leaving off when they please, striking an octave above or below (in case they have pitched the tune too low or too high), or hitting some other note that chords, so as to produce the effect of a marvelous complication and variety,

and yet with the most perfect time, and rarely with any discord . . . they seem not infrequently to strike sounds that cannot be precisely represented . . . slides from one note to another, and turns and cadences not in articulated notes.

Apart from the apparent use of rhythm, this kind of singing is not unlike the folk style of psalm singing. The 'effect of a marvelous complication and variety' combined with 'the most perfect time,' or sense of rhythm, is partly produced by the unison singing in the call-and-response form. The references to 'slides,' 'turns,' and 'cadences' are clues to the blue tonality that must have pervaded the whole performance.

Spirituals are still being sung in this fashion today. In 1951, on a field trip to Bluffton, South Carolina (a small village about 30 miles north of Savannah), Mr. Arthur Alberts and I recorded a dozen or so religious songs in this style. The singers themselves were quite aware that they were singing in the 'old-time' style, and took pride in it, a pride fostered by the work of Mrs. Lydia Parrish in and around the same area. This style of singing made a comeback in the early 'thirties, when contests were held, but it began to die out soon after.

In the Bluffton group of eight singers, headed by the Reverend L. E. Graham, each singer took his or her turn at leading the song. 'We sing not like it's written—everybody sing melody.' This meant that each had a chance to sing the call while the rest of the group responded. By far the most exciting of the songs was led by a farmer named George Bush who had just joined the group and whose fiery improvisations—savoring of the cry—embarrassed some of the other singers. They all disclaimed any connection with the Sanctified Church and the popular gospel song, which they associated with more worldly and less stable people. 'I've got to be satisfied,' Miss Geneva Mitchell remarked, 'before I'm sanctified.'

Again, an identical style of unison singing was recorded by Anthony Schwartz in the 'forties: a religious tune, 'The Drinking of the Wine' (privately issued), sung by the menhaden fishermen off Barnegat Light. These fishermen, recruited from the entire East coast and especially Florida, were using the tune as a work song as they hauled in fish nets. The call of the leader is answered by a unison roar of the crew as they tug at the nets together, and the sound of the incidental harmony is weird and wonderful.

In the recordings of a quartet known as Mitchell's Christian Singers, made in the 'twenties and later, we can hear a fascinating transitional stage in the evolution of harmony. Whether or not the legend that they never heard a piano is true, the group sings 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' (Melotone 6-04-64) as if they had just discovered the three simplest chords in our music. Here is European harmony—the harmony of the hymn—with the dew still on it. The transitions to the final chord, with what Fanny Kemble would have described as their 'extraordinarily wild and unaccountable' slurs, dips, slides, and loops, bring exclamations of delight from modern academic musicians who have tried—and failed—to notate them.

Searching for the origin of the harmony of the spiritual (and sometimes its melody) *as written down* can lead to the conviction that all spirituals were taken from the Protestant hymn. But the truth is that only the harmony of the spiritual could have come directly from the Protestant hymn, and even that was transformed at once by the cry into an over-all blue tonality that is unknown in the Old World. (This transformation was explained, not very long ago, by the theory that the Negro was unable to copy the Protestant hymn correctly—which may well be true in a sense not intended.) The transformation to a bittersweet blue tonality, shifting in and out of a mood and mode that

is at once sad and gay, gives the spiritual one of its most appealing qualities.

The use of harmony, like the use of melody and rhythm, in Negro religious music varies infinitely according to time, place, and performer. The spiritual, as we know it on the concert stage, has the most European and the fewest African qualities of all American Negro music. At the same time, melodies of equal beauty are still being improvised at Negro religious services all over the country today. (They can be recorded, but not written down *as sung*.) 'In spite of indifference and resentment from many educated and middle class Negroes,' writes Sterling Brown of Howard University, 'the spirituals are still sung, circulated, altered and created by folk Negroes.'<sup>12</sup> And Alan Lomax writes:<sup>13</sup>

... there can be no question in the minds and hearts of those who have heard them that in the Negro spirituals American folk art reaches its highest point. Indeed, we assert that these songs form the most impressive body of music so far produced by America, ranking with the best music anywhere on this earth.

The religious music of the Negro continues to furnish a reservoir of inspiration to the entire jazz tradition.

## B

## Ragtime

Ragtime flourished for about twenty years—from 1896 to 1917. Unlike the spiritual and the blues, the mood of ragtime is unfailingly cheerful, which may help to explain its sudden popularity toward the end of the long depression of the 1890's. The general public first heard ragtime near the turn of the century at a series of World's Fairs in Chicago, Omaha, Buffalo, and St. Louis, where itinerant pianists from the South and Midwest found employment along the midways.

By 1900, Tin-Pan Alley took over and ragtime became the coast-to-coast craze, along with a dance called the 'cake-walk,' circling the globe and taking London and Paris by storm. Inevitably, the character of the music was softened but its essentially 'raggy' or rhythmic nature could not be concealed. Ragtime became an indestructible part of the American musical scene, associated in the popular mind with the mechanical sound of the player piano. To this day, when the movies, radio, or television wish to evoke the proper mood for a barroom scene or its equivalent, they turn to ragtime.

Ragtime represents a deeper and more complete blending of West African and European musical elements, with a greater borrowing from the European, than anything that had gone before. It is no accident that ragtime origi-

nated in the Midwest and not in New Orleans, and that there were first-class white as well as Negro composers and performers. The greatest of them all, Scott Joplin, who happened to be a Negro, studied classical music long and well, as the form of ragtime attests. (After a while, Tin-Pan Alley learned to set some of it down on sheet music in a simplified form.)

Ragtime is largely notated piano music in the European tradition of written composition. Anyone who can read music can play it. The better compositions, however, are very difficult and require a jazz-oriented sense of rhythm. But ragtime is such a balanced blending that it became an end in itself, an undeviating approach to all music (you can 'rag' any tune). In that sense it was limited and therefore gradually grew away from the mainstream of jazz.

As piano music, ragtime lacked the expressiveness that can be heard in the field-holler and cry. It was confined to the tempered scale. This was an advantage, of course, when it came to form and structure. From the first, ragtime had a pseudo-rondo pattern of its own, a pattern which more or less resembles the rondo form of the minuet and the scherzo. (The pattern also occurs in the march, a more likely source for ragtime.) This pattern constituted a large and well-assimilated borrowing from European music.

For example, Joplin's 'Maple Leaf Rag' consists of four different tunes or strains, each 16 bars long. If we give each of them a letter of the alphabet, they occur in this order: AABBACCD. (In the classical rondo, the first strain returns regularly before each new strain.) The third strain (CC) or trio—a name taken from the march—is often the featured tune, frequently repeated. With this European form came the distinction between composer and performer. Joplin composed the best rags, for example, but others performed them more effectively.

Yet ragtime was decidedly new. It could be instantly recognized anywhere in the world because of its rhythm. Although in *They All Played Ragtime*, Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis point out that ragtime melodies frequently come from folk tunes, these melodies are less obvious than the rhythm. W. C. Handy, a champion of the blues, defines ragtime as 'rhythm without much melody,' a definition that fits a great deal of the later, more commercial type. For, unlike European music, ragtime is syncopated from start to finish. Syncopation (i.e. accenting the normally weak beat) had been used in classical music to communicate a feeling of restlessness and revolt. It had to be employed sparingly, however, because it soon set up a new, unsyncopated beat as the memory of the original beat faded. Ragtime solved this problem for better or worse by maintaining both a syncopated and an unsyncopated beat at the same time.

In its simplest form, the rhythm of ragtime consists of a steady beat in the left hand and a syncopated beat in the right hand. Thus, the left hand plays a heavy 2/4 rhythm, much like the march from which it is probably borrowed. The right hand plays eight beats in the same interval, but accents every third beat, an effect that may well have been taken from the minstrel banjo. This has been called 'secondary rag,' and it sounds just like the beginning of 'Twelfth Street Rag,' or at a slower tempo, 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love.' It can be graphed as follows:

RIGHT	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8   1
LEFT	1 2 3 4   1 2 3 4   1 2 3 4   1

Borneman describes this as 'splitting the bar metrically rather than accentually,' and adds that it is 'unmistakably African in origin and approach.'<sup>1</sup> The combination sug-

gests—intermittently and out-of-phase—a component of regular *vodun* rhythm.

This continual syncopation, which was easily notated, is merely the foundation. On top of this a good pianist improvises an endless variety of rhythmic suspensions, unusual accents, and between-the-beat effects. In other words, the best ragtime incorporates the horizontal rhythmic flow of all good American Negro music. It also retains its European form. The blend is a rare and sophisticated piano music that can be well played only by a very few, highly gifted virtuosos. They were the fountainhead of the rag-time craze.

In so far as it borrowed from European music, ragtime could be watered down, notated, and sold from coast to coast. In the form of sheet music, it was hawked at every music counter. The inevitable result perhaps is the monotony that we associate with the player piano. Most piano-roll companies employed a hack who could 'rag' any tune for issue on a piano roll in an equally nondescript fashion (one, at least, was still at work in 1956). And ragtime made good money for at least twenty years.

During the reign of ragtime, the formal European elements seem to have decreased slightly while the African elements increased. On the one hand, the pseudo-rondo form was whittled down to two or three strains, instead of the customary four—and sometimes only one was actually performed. On the other hand, both the harmony and the rhythm evolved in a direction opposite to that of European models. Thus, the piano went as far as it could to simulate blue tonality by playing a major and minor third ('E' and 'E-flat' in the scale of 'C') either consecutively or simultaneously. (This is a device that George Gershwin used again and again in 'Rhapsody in Blue.') The resulting dissonance, although slight, is a flagrant violation of old-time classical harmony. It became the hallmark of rag-

time. And bit by bit, the rhythm became more flowing.

Tracing the growth of rhythmic complexity in ragtime is difficult because, here again, everything depends upon the performer. If we took our cues from the sheet music of the time, the result would be complete confusion, for almost every rhythmic trick imaginable was tried at an early date—whether or not the purchaser of the music could play it. This state of affairs was soon rectified by simplifying the sheet music, and any resemblance to the original was purely coincidental. Nevertheless, we do have a few piano rolls, played probably by the pioneers themselves, and the occasional testimony of witnesses who heard these pioneers in person.

The development of this rhythmic complexity has become associated, whether correctly or not, with certain geographical areas in the United States. Actually, there is no reason to believe that the same evolutionary process was not taking place, for example, along the Eastern coast—at a slower or perhaps less apparent rate. In any case, the parent style has been labeled 'Sedalia,' since this Missouri town first witnessed the growing fame of Scott Joplin. Joplin specified that his rags should be played slowly, in march tempo, and the piano rolls that survive (if authentic) prove that he practiced what he preached. The effect is like plain secondary rag—a plodding, heavy syncopation with no particular flow. Yet the over-all structure and the melodic lines are splendid, a fact which accounts for the fame of these compositions especially when played by a more gifted performer.

The next step in the process is connected with St. Louis, which is frequently referred to as the birthplace of ragtime. Pioneer musicians—both white and Negro—such as Tom Turpin, Louis Chauvin, and later, Artie Mathews began to play Joplin's rags and rags of their own composing with new fire and life. The difference is electric. Per-

haps one of the not-too-technical changes may be described as the gradual disappearance of the heavy march two-beat in the left hand. Instead, the left hand tended to play four beats in the same time interval, evenly accented—no more 'oom-pah.' This, in addition to a little more complicated accenting in the right hand, made for a better and more flowing rhythm. In essence, the music simply became more infectious and danceable. (A clear-cut illustration of this change occurs on the last chorus of pianist Ralph Sutton's recording of 'Grace and Beauty' (Down Home #10) where he departs from the score for a whirlwind finish.)

The third step toward the development of a more complex rhythm is associated with New Orleans and ably illustrated by Jelly Roll Morton. Morton, Tony Jackson, and other New Orleans pianists heard the rolling rhythms created by the popular marching bands, and they began to incorporate these rhythms into their improvisations. In his left hand, for example, Morton adds a 'walking' (i.e. with melodic figures) bass and a contrapuntal melody. In his right hand, he adds further between-the-beat accents. Although the tempo is slower, the music has a new and increased swing and flow. The difference is strikingly illustrated by his two versions of 'Maple Leaf Rag' in the Library of Congress recordings (Circle, Album III, Sides 21-22).

The fourth and last step is best represented by the music played in New York City, during the late 'teens and early 'twenties. It was a big step, involving a new and deeper fusion of European harmony and African rhythms, and its ancestry was long obscured by labels such as 'house-party,' 'rent-party,' 'parlor social,' or simply 'Harlem' piano style. Ragtime reached its peak as a balanced blend in the compositions and performances of Luckeyeth Roberts, James P. Johnson, Willie Smith, Fats Waller, and a host of lesser names. The music ranged from the revival-meeting

rhythms of Johnson's 'Carolina Shout' (Okeh 4495) to the Debussy-esque impressionism of Smith's 'Morning Air' (Decca 2269). For while assimilating other European elements, these musicians played with an increasingly forceful rhythm.

Meanwhile, the success of ragtime and its diluted and derivative forms was overwhelming. It became a featured part of latter-day minstrelsy, vaudeville, cabaret, and café. It became a syncopated way of life—and the light classics were ragged over and over again. On his European tours, beginning in 1900, John Philip Sousa featured such ragtime numbers as 'At a Georgia Camp Meeting' (Victor 315—a later version), 'Smokey Mokes,' and 'Hunkie Dory.' It was a far cry from the real thing and yet old recordings lend support to the legend that Sousa preferred 'jazzy' drummers. Debussy's 'Golliwog's Cakewalk' and Stravinsky's 'Ragtime for Eleven Instruments' document the deep impression that ragtime made abroad, before Milhaud and other European composers became interested in jazz in the 'twenties.

Eventually, ragtime seems to have fallen apart under its own weight. At least development ceased, perhaps because of the difficulty of the music itself. The public could not play the real thing and the publishers could not make money issuing it. A few brave publishers such as John Stark, who enjoyed the music, refused to give up. Scott Joplin had indicated the ultimate goal, however, when he composed a ragtime opera, *Treemonisha*, which was performed once only (1915). Similarly, the late James P. Johnson composed choral works, concertos, and symphonies in the same idiom. The inner drive of ragtime composers—like that of most jazzmen—was toward musical respectability, which means one thing: European concepts. But the time was not ripe.

In the early 'fifties, James P. Johnson, old and sick, often



Earl Leaf

A sense of rhythm is acquired



*From Jazz West Coast by William Claxton, Linear Publications, Hollywood, 1955.*

Max Roach

wondered what could have happened to his beloved ragtime. For a brief moment, it seemed that the large compositions upon which he had been working were about to be accepted and played, along with the time-honored classics of Mozart and Beethoven. Johnson's concertos were quite as complex and, in a sense, twice as difficult to play as Mozart's. Perhaps his Afro-American folk origins betrayed him, for the average classical musician is utterly incapable of the rhythmic sensitivity that is necessary to play Johnson's pieces. Only an orchestra composed of Smiths, Wallers, and Johnsons could have done it. James P. Johnson died in 1955.

The less complex part of ragtime did find a place to go. It was incorporated into orchestral jazz. This transition from piano to jazzband is emphatically demonstrated, once more, by the talented Jelly Roll Morton and his Red Hot Peppers. The trend was in the air and fast becoming a reality, but Morton gave it outstanding form and substance. He simply orchestrated his own piano compositions for a seven-piece jazzband. Here, the orchestral qualities of his piano style, formed by listening to marching bands, help to explain his unqualified success. The solo and band versions of 'Kansas City Stomps' (Gennett 5218; Bluebird 5109), for example, offer startling proof.

Morton left little to chance on his Red Hot Pepper recordings of the mid-twenties. On 'Doctor Jazz,' 'Black Bottom Stomp,' and 'The Chant,' he frequently wrote out ensemble parts for both clarinet and cornet—an unheard of bit of interference with the New Orleans tradition. He also left ample space for his own contrasting piano solos. Wholly dominated by Morton's forceful personality, these recordings have a rare cohesion. Their ragtime origins make them sound over-arranged today—they start and stop on the button, according to the four original strains and Morton's notions of abrupt contrast. But they also have a

fiery pulse of their own, and the listener cannot help wondering what might have happened if the band had been given its head.

Ragtime faded out around 1917 as the blues began to come in. A list of song titles and dates of publication bear this out. Actually, ragtime continued to be played under the new name of 'jazz,' and is played to this day as a prominent part of a repertory associated with the Dixieland style. Above and beyond actual piano rags such as 'Maple Leaf,' 'Eccentric,' and 'That's A Plenty,' which are standard in the Dixieland repertory, this style is noted for its repeated renditions of such ragtime-flavored tunes as 'Sensation,' 'Original Dixieland One Step,' 'Ostrich Walk,' 'Muskrat Ramble,' and many others. With the exception of an occasional blues, Dixieland is largely orchestral ragtime, formally simplified and rhythmically complicated.

By the 'twenties, blues were popular, the phonograph made orchestral music available, and the radio made music itself inexpensive and common. Piano ragtime passed into the popular but comparatively uninspired hands of Rube Bloom, Ohman and Arden, and Zez Confrey ('Kitten on the Keys'), among others. Later, the swing bands of the later 'thirties—Chick Webb, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, and Earl Hines—recorded ragtime tunes such as 'Maple Leaf' and 'Down Home,' re-arranged and almost unrecognizable after the first chorus. During the 'forties, only a revival of ragtime on the West Coast kept many tunes recorded and available.

Ragtime developed a wider and more influential fusion of European and African musical elements than ever before. It began with such a large component of formal European characteristics that (although it absorbed more and more of the African rhythmic complexity during its twenty-year popularity) it was never able to go the rest of the way and incorporate the bittersweet mood of the blues. Rag-

time remained cheerful, pianistic in concept, and predominantly European. But just because of this, ragtime spread farther—and thinner—than any preceding wave of Afro-American music, carrying with it an elementary but basic introduction to new rhythms.

LIBRARY  
DISPLAY  
CASE  
SERIALS  
DEPT.