

# EARLY "JAZZ"

## African-American Performance Practices, 1921-1934



# BASIC TERMS

## associated with Jazz and Blues

*blue note:* a note about 2 steps above the tonic, that can't be named in the European vocabulary of pitches because it falls 'between' them.

*syncopation:* rhythm in which notes that are *off* (i.e. between) the beats are emphasized more than those falling *on* the beats.

*turn-around:* intensified, rapidly changing harmony that marks the return to the beginning of a form.

*improvisation:* an aspect of music that is spontaneous, rather than pre-planned.

# REVIEW: The Blues

- 3 FEATURES THAT CONTRAST from EURO-AMERICAN TRADITION: blue notes, syncopation, and an (asymmetrical) form
- AESTHETICS: irony and circumlocution associated with some rural African-American culture, tension between predictability/repetition and unpredictability/surprise.
- Though descended from African-American diasporic tradition, the term is primarily associated with a commodified music played by urban entertainers
- The growth of the recording industry in 1919 quickly "internationalizes" W.C. Handy's music, and the 12-bar form.

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<b>melody:</b>	<b>A</b>					<b>A'</b>						<b>B</b>				
<b>harmony:</b>	I					IV	I					V	IV	I		
<b>meter:</b>	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9	10	11	12	

**3x5 only! Please help us by making your last name is legible (for alphabetization).**

- Your Name (neatly written is nice!)
- Student I.D. #

**4. Which of the following does NOT describe a diasporic aspect of early American culture?**

- a. The movement of slave laborers from West Africa to the American South.
- b. The displacement of European working-class during economic disasters, to find work in the new industries of the United States.
- c. The movement of real-estate speculators to the American continent for new acquisitions and sources of profit.
- d. The 19<sup>th</sup>-c displacement of slaves agricultural workers from Cotton Plantations to factories in the north.

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The term "jazz," by itself, is troublesome:

- it refers to virtually any style of music innovated by early 20th-century African American entertainers.
- Most of those styles utilize European harmony infected by "blue notes", and sometimes including strange and unstable *harmonies*.
- Rhythms derived from unique diversity of cultural influences in New Orleans
- Spread among African American musicians living along the Mississippi river.

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The famously *syncopated* and *layered* rhythms that were the hallmark of early jazz have many cultural origins:

- Latin American and Caribbean dance styles,
- African-American ring-shouts and gospel singing
- Anglo-American fiddle playing
- Some patriotic French and English marching band music.

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**These numerous cultures come together powerfully within reach of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, where international influences affected the daily lives of working-class black musicians.**

New Orleans      Kansas City      Memphis  
St. Louis          Louisville

# Songs of the Jazz tradition: Tin-pan alley

- 1880s: the 28th St. region of Manhattan (aka "Tin Pan Alley") became a center for a diaspora of Russian/Eastern European Jewish refugees
- Yiddish Theater is popularized at the turn of the century, but fades in the late 1910s - early 20s.
- 1925-1935 = Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age. Songwriters and publishers work for Broadway, the film industry, and music publishing industries.
- "TIN PAN ALLEY" songs become a mainstay of urban musical culture, coinciding with the popularization of Jazz, and influencing black songwriters.
- JAZZ = a performance practice / TIN-PAN ALLEY = songwriting practice

# Songs of the Jazz tradition: Tin-pan alley

- [Last slide:] JAZZ = a performance practice /  
TIN-PAN ALLEY = songwriting practice
- **notable composers included:** Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, George Gershwin
- **song performers included:** Louis Armstrong, Ethel Finney, Al Jolson ("the jazz singer"), Josephine Baker, and Bing Crosby

# Jerome Kern (1885-1945)



- Born to upper-middle class German-Jewish-Americans in mid-town Manhattan.
- Age 14: Began composing musical theater for social clubs
- In his 20s, worked as rehearsal pianist in theaters, and wrote music for silent film.
- From 1915 onward, wrote for low-budget off-Broadway shows
- 1925: met the great lyricist Oscar Hammerstein, with whom his most well-known songs were written.

# Josephine Baker (1906-1975)



- Birth unknown, adopted by former slaves in Arkansas
- Ran away and lived on streets from age 12 in St. Louis.
- At the dawn of the *Harlem Renaissance*, traveled to New York to audition for roles at clubs.
- Popular not as much for her talent as for her personality.
- Known for excellent comic timing, imitations, and caricatures
- Also known for minstrel-like ridicule of rural black identity.
- Early influence on Billy Holiday

# Developments in 1920s Jazz



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