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"Untamed Music": Early Jazz in Vaudeville

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Abstract:

(jazz, vaudeville, early jazz, jazz history)

Vaudeville, which was one of the most influential entertainment genres in America at the turn of the century, was also important to the early development of jazz. Vaudeville's role in jazz history has not often figured into discussions of early jazz because the earliest jazz historians were record collectors who relied heavily on sound recordings to establish the history of the music, leading them to marginalize the contributions of musicians or bands that did not make records. Touring vaudeville, minstrel shows, and circuses played a crucial role in jazz's development and dissemination. Many of the influential jazz artists of the teens and twenties, such as Alvin "Zoo" Robertson, Wilbur Sweatman, Freddie Keppard, and Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton began their careers playing in tents and theaters around the country as vaudeville entertainers.

Traveling vaudeville shows were the most significant factor in the spread of jazz before the advent of recording, and brought early jazz to appreciative audiences even before 1917, when the first jazz recordings became available. After these initial recordings, the shows carried jazz to remote areas of the country where jazz records were less likely to be available. These shows continued to be important for the careers of jazz musicians until the mid thirties, when the ascendance of film and radio led to vaudeville's terminal decline. In this paper I explore in detail the role that touring vaudeville shows played in the development and popularization of jazz in the first decades of the twentieth century.

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

“UNTAMED MUSIC”: EARLY JAZZ IN VAUDEVILLE

By

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Introduction

This paper explores the central—and seldom discussed—role that vaudeville played in the national popularization of the new music that we now know as jazz in the teens, twenties, and thirties. I will argue that vaudeville shows (and vaudeville-style entertainment generally, in the cases of circus sideshows, floor shows, and revues) were as important as recordings in the early dissemination of jazz and in jazz's rapid metamorphosis from a regional, predominantly African-American folk music to an internationally popular art form. I also consider the influence that vaudeville performance and culture had on jazz performance practice, focusing on elements such as expressive devices and showmanship in jazz performance.

Traditional biases in jazz research have largely precluded sustained discussion of the role that vaudeville played in jazz history. The study of early jazz as established by the first jazz researchers in the 1930s prized “authentic” folk expression and rejected anything that hinted of commercialism. As John Gennari notes in his history of jazz criticism, the earliest jazz historians viewed jazz history through a decidedly anticommercial lens:

...there emerged an aestheticized discourse of jazz as an art music, a discourse—carried out in collectors' “hot clubs” and in the Modernism-inspired “little magazines” attached to them— that became central to the establishment of a jazz canon centered on recordings other than the most commercially successful, largely white acts of the swing era. This

anticonmercial, connoisseurial discourse has been central to jazz—has, in fact, defined the very idea of jazz—down to our time.¹

The anticonmercial discourse that characterized jazz historiography in the 1930s and 1940s led historians of the period to elevate the work of unschooled New Orleans musicians like Willie “Bunk” Johnson and Charles “Buddy” Bolden while devaluing the more commercial work of musicians like Wilbur Sweatman. For example, historians often dismissed Sweatman, a contemporary of the earliest known New Orleans jazz musicians, as a mere “novelty” musician because he spent his career in vaudeville. Consequently, they mostly failed to investigate his impressive jazz credentials, which include what is arguably the first recorded example of jazz improvisation.^{*} The precedent set by the first jazz historians has left a large hole in scholarly discourse regarding early jazz musicians’ activities in vaudeville.

In recent years, a few books on the period of jazz history between 1908 and 1923 have dealt with vaudeville, usually in the context of biographies or studies of individual bands. Lawrence Gushee’s *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* chronicles the touring career of the famous Creole Band, which played and performed around the country in vaudeville from 1914 to 1918. In supplementary biographical material of each musician in the band, Gushee goes into detail about their early careers, including other touring engagements that they held. He also discusses vaudeville’s importance in turn-of-the-century America and the flexible definitions of the words “jazz” and “ragtime” at this point

¹ John Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 121.

* See Chapter 2

in the music's history. Gushee makes use of newspaper articles and interviews to piece together the Creole Band's touring schedule between 1914 and 1918 as well as contemporary reviews of the band in order to make educated guesses as to how they may have sounded.

Another book providing information on jazz in American vaudeville and circuses is Mark Berresford's *That's Got 'Em! The Life and Music of Wilbur C. Sweatman*. In chronicling the life of pioneering jazz and vaudeville clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman, Berresford investigates some previously unexplored areas of the early history of jazz. He provides information not only on Sweatman's performance dates and playing style, but also on the little-known musicians with whom he played, who were among the first generation of jazz musicians. Berresford, interestingly, wrote this biography with the express purpose of shedding light on this facet of jazz history. In his introduction, he writes:

“In researching and writing this book, it became apparent early on that the roles of black theater, tented touring shows, circus sideshows, and vaudeville played a much greater part in the early development of jazz than has generally been acknowledged. One could go so far as to state that, without an established, self-directed black theater and entertainment network already in place by the beginning of the twentieth century, the whole course of jazz history would have been altered massively.”²

Because of the wealth of information that Berresford offers on Sweatman and other early jazz musicians touring America at the turn of the century, *That's Got 'Em* is among the most thoroughly researched and useful books on early jazz.

Like Berresford's book, Abbott and Seroff's *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* is

² Mark Berresford, *That's Got 'Em! The Life and Music of Wilbur C. Sweatman* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), xi.

devoted to the argument that stage shows played an important role in the development of jazz, but unlike Berresford's book, *Ragged but Right* is primarily concerned with tent shows and circuses rather than theatrical vaudeville. Abbott and Seroff include detailed rosters and touring schedules of several minstrel companies in the appendices. The main text includes biographical information on important minstrel musicians and actors, as well as copious newspaper advertisements, reviews, and photographs.

This paper will take a broader view of the roles jazz musicians played throughout the history of American vaudeville. From the turn of the century to the mid-1930s, vaudeville was one of the most popular and influential entertainment genres in America. It served as one of the first conduits through which popular culture and trends reached the American masses. Vaudeville shows provided the public with some of the first pop music and with a lexicon of beloved stage personalities. In the period before the proliferation of radio and television, white entertainers performed in a network of theaters in cities around the country, dispensing the latest Tin Pan Alley songs as well as comedy and stunts. Similarly, black entertainers toured circuits of smaller theaters catering to black audiences and performed in tented variety shows.

Regardless of race, and in all performance contexts, these artists played a crucial role in the spread of popular music. As Lawrence Gushee writes in his *Pioneers of Jazz*, "the primary mode of dissemination of the popular song in the United States between 1900 and 1930 was the vaudeville stage."³ Popular

³ Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

culture as represented by vaudeville permeated American society to an unprecedented extent and was a potent vehicle for the proliferation of new ideas and styles.

African-American folk music was arguably the first style to reach the wider American public through the medium of touring stage shows. Although the widespread popularity of black music reached an early peak in the ragtime era of the 1890s, the roots of this fascination are in the minstrel shows of the mid-19th century. The classic minstrel show, as developed by Dan Emmett and the Virginia Minstrels, was a sort of proto-vaudeville that drew most of its material from a heavily caricatured version of black folk culture. These shows typically included music as well as comedy skits and dances.⁴ Classic minstrelsy was extremely popular with the white American public, especially in the Northeast. Although built largely on negative stereotypes, these shows were important in that they spread the *idea* of black music and culture to the general public, thus creating an audience for later productions and paving the way for less-demeaning representations of African-Americans.

This earliest form of American touring entertainment was also important in that it provided the first important large-scale performance opportunities for African-Americans. Black minstrel companies, which became prominent in the years immediately following the Civil War, performed on very successful extended tours and served to establish an African-American presence in American theater by the late 19th century. Black minstrelsy tended to be less

⁴ Clayton W. Henderson, "Minstrelsy, American," In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18749> (accessed February 11, 2012).

reliant on racial stereotypes for humor, and black minstrel companies introduced new elements, such as gospel music, to the established formula of the traditional minstrel show. By the 1890s, these groups were performing in a sort of hybrid vaudeville-minstrel style influenced by Broadway productions and the music of Tin Pan Alley.⁵

At the end of the 19th century, white and black vaudeville shows had incorporated the popular new ragtime style into their acts, typically in the form of simplified “coon songs.” Reflecting the influence of black minstrelsy and vaudeville, “coon songs,” while still uncomfortably racist by modern standards, were more representative of an authentic black perspective.⁶ Although ragtime did not become widely known until the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, touring shows were performing syncopated pieces in the ragtime style by the late 1880s.⁷ American vaudeville companies would demonstrate a similar sensitivity to new musical ideas and changes in popular taste in their early incorporation of jazz in the first decades of the 20th century.

By the early teens, small-time black vaudeville companies and circus sideshow troupes were already displaying the influence of early jazz in both their ensemble work and in the playing of their featured soloists. Many pioneers of jazz, including Freddie Keppard, William Crickett Smith, Willie “Bunk” Johnson, Alvin “Zoo” Robertson, Horace Eubanks, William “King” Phillips, Wilbur Sweatman, and Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, spent the first part of their careers

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 12.

⁷ Edward A. Berlin, “Ragtime,” In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22825> (accessed February 11, 2012).

working with touring vaudeville shows or circuses. Vaudeville work was an important source of income for professional jazz musicians in the early 1900s. New Orleans guitarist Danny Barker later remembered that in the late teens and early twenties,

...all the big circuses would come through New Orleans. And if they needed a musician, they know they could pick one up in New Orleans. All the minstrel shows, like the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, and Silas Green and the Georgia Minstrels, used New Orleans musicians year in and out. You would see a cat disappear, you would wonder where he was, and finally somebody would say that he'd left for one of the shows, that they had sent for him.⁸

In a vaudeville context, jazz was not played by small groups of non-reading musicians, but by small to medium-sized orchestras that played a mixture of improvised music and sheet music to accompany the acts during shows. In this way, black orchestras in small-time vaudeville adopted an early practice of white vaudeville orchestras, which in the 1870s and 1880s had relied heavily on improvised cues to “follow” the acts onstage. It is easy to see how early jazz improvisation fit easily into this preexisting tradition. Limited improvisation, usually from one or two key soloists in the ensemble, also appeared in the street parades that advertised a vaudeville troupe’s arrival in a new town.

During these early years, jazz musicians often worked as featured soloists with the black vaudeville orchestras. William “King” Phillips, for example, worked for years as a clarinetist and orchestra leader with touring vaudeville troupes. Jazz clarinetist Buster Bailey would later remember Phillips as “one of the first

⁸ Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 67.

jazz clarinet players [he] ever heard.”⁹ Even more important was clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman, who was a noted soloist with PG Lowery’s circus sideshow band as early as 1902. In 1908, Sweatman moved to Chicago and formed what observers remembered as one of the first jazz bands. In 1925, bandleader Dave Peyton would write, “little did we think that Mr. Sweatman’s original style of playing would be adopted by the greatest jazz artists of today; but it is and Mr. Sweatman can claim the honour of being the first to establish it.”¹⁰ In 1916, Sweatman went on to make what was arguably the first jazz recording. His recording of his composition “Down Home Rag” is the clearest recorded example of jazz improvisation that we have dating from before the jazz band recordings of the late teens.

A few early jazz bands also appeared in mainstream white vaudeville before 1917. The most famous of these was the Creole Band, which was best known for featuring cornetist Freddie Keppard. The Creole Band spent four seasons touring on mainstream vaudeville circuits, where they framed their music with an act strongly resembling traditional minstrelsy.

Jazz’s rapid rise to popularity following the 1917 Original Dixieland Jazz Band recordings led to the widespread use of jazz in all sorts of vaudeville contexts. The new music was everywhere in vaudeville, and the two art forms became nearly inseparable. As David Savran wrote: “...for the many Americans, both white and black, who frequented dance halls, vaudeville shows, and musical

⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰ Mark Berresford, *That’s Got ‘Em! The Life and Music of Wilbur C. Sweatman* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 51-52.

comedy, theater was jazz—and jazz was theater.”¹¹ During these years, vaudeville shows used jazz for comedic effect (as in the ODJB’s barnyard sound effects), to accompany singers, and to accompany dancers like Joe Frisco, Frank Farnum, and the Whitman Sisters.

With the rise of the big bands at the start of the Swing Era, the freewheeling ensemble improvisation of 1920s jazz was replaced by tight, disciplined ensemble work and carefully allotted solo space for outstanding improvisers. This in turn led to a shift in jazz’s image in the popular imagination. The American public no longer viewed jazz as chaotic or a nuisance. Instead, jazz acquired a new sophistication and respectability, while also achieving its widest popularity. This shift is adumbrated by bandleader Paul Whiteman’s “symphonic jazz” concerts, which featured new works by George Gershwin and Ferde Grofé. Correspondingly, jazz musicians began to play less for comedic effect and more to provide incidental music, to accompany virtuoso dancers, and for a few feature numbers interspersed throughout a show. Major vaudeville shows, now known as revues, included comedians, singers, specialty acts, dancing chorus lines and dancers like Fred Astaire or the Nicholas Brothers, accompanied by swing bands like those of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Chick Webb.¹² Jazz continued to appear in revues as accompaniment until the

¹¹ David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 4.

¹² Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 11-23.

decline of white vaudeville in the early thirties, followed a few years later by the decline of black vaudeville in the face of the now-dominant film industry.¹³

The history of jazz up to the 1940s dovetails neatly with the history of American popular entertainment, a designation that for the first few decades of the 20th century was synonymous with vaudeville. As a result, it is illuminating to explore the relationship between America's music and what for a long time was America's popular theater. The following chapters will challenge previously held assumptions about jazz history—particularly those regarding New Orleans as the sole birthplace of early jazz—and shed light on jazz's place in the broader popular culture landscape of the early 20th century.

¹³ Nadine George-Graves, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville: The Whitman Sisters and the Negotiation of Race, Gender, and Class in African-American Theater, 1900-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 103-109.

Chapter 1: The Development of Vaudeville

From its inception in the late 19th century to its gradual decline beginning in the 1930s, vaudeville was America's most popular and influential entertainment genre. The dramatic growth and change that America experienced during vaudeville's heyday (from the 1880s to the 1930s) created two factors that allowed the art form to gain an unprecedented level of popularity with the entire nation. First, the mechanization of American factories in the late 19th century lowered the demand for manual labor and created the idea of "leisure time" for the working class. This in turn led to a much greater demand for popular entertainment, a need that vaudeville met readily.¹⁴ Second, the vast influx of European immigrants in the second half of the 19th century—twenty million arrived between 1870 and 1910—created a new audience hungry for entertainment that was cheap and definitively "American."¹⁵ These things, combined with the technological advances of the late 19th century, made vaudeville an exceptional conduit for the transmission of new and exciting ideas in the arts. New inventions like trains, automobiles, and steamships made fast long distance travel feasible, meaning that performers could quickly travel around the country to perform strings of engagements in different cities.¹⁶ Telephones and telegraphs allowed for long-distance booking and negotiations.¹⁷ This distribution system became even more efficient after the creation of a corporate

¹⁴ Trav S. D., *No Applause—Just Throw Money: The Book that Made Vaudeville Famous* (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2005), 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

structure in which entertainers would tour around circuits of theaters owned by a single large management firm, such as the Keith-Albee Circuit.¹⁸ The management infrastructure that developed around vaudeville was the root of the modern American entertainment industry.

The earliest manifestation of vaudeville, also called variety, grew out of various disparate 19th century entertainment genres. Minstrel shows were the most popular form of American entertainment just before vaudeville; most of vaudeville's defining elements came directly from the earlier genre. Minstrel entertainers introduced the "comedy team," a concept that continues to be vitally important to American comedy. A typical minstrel show featured comedic dialogue between Mr. Interlocutor (an early version of comedy's "straight man") and Mr. Tambo and Mr. Bones, who would bounce jokes off him.¹⁹ This formula has reappeared in nearly all forms of comedy since the minstrel era. An even more consequential element of minstrelsy was the olio, which was the climax of a classic minstrel show. The olio was a seemingly random collection of acts; it featured musicians, comedic speeches, drag acts, jig dancers, and miscellaneous entertainment.²⁰ A few decades later, variety entertainment would emerge as essentially an expanded version of the minstrel olio. Circuses were another important influence on early vaudeville. Like vaudeville, they featured a variety of different acts, including jugglers, acrobats, trained animals, and clowns. Many of vaudeville's seminal figures spent their early careers working in circuses; actor and manager Tony Pastor got his start there, as did vaudeville

¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

²⁰ Ibid.

tycoon B. F. Keith, who ran away to work as a roustabout for a circus at age fourteen.²¹ Pastor, who worked briefly as a ringmaster,²² remained heavily influenced by circus culture for the rest of his career; he often greeted guests at his theaters dressed in the ringmaster's uniform of top hat, swallowtail coat, and riding boots.²³ A third early influence on vaudeville was the boat show. Boat shows, though little-known today, were a popular regional entertainment in mid 19th century America. Essentially floating theater companies, boat shows played to audiences along the Mississippi River and its tributaries, often in exchange for food or goods.²⁴

The first vaudeville shows were largely an urban phenomenon and took place in seedy establishments known as variety houses or concert saloons. Beginning in the 1850s, variety entertainment existed mainly within the vice districts of towns and cities, such as the Bowery and Chinatown in New York City, the Black Hole and Hell's Half Acre in Chicago, and San Francisco's Barbary Coast.²⁵ Although members of polite society largely tolerated variety houses and concert saloons, they viewed them as disreputable. This negative reputation was mostly correct; many variety houses were rife with prostitution, brawling, and drunkenness.²⁶ Early vaudeville shows catered almost exclusively to men. Songs often had suggestive lyrics,²⁷ and many houses featured troupes of women who performed in various stages of undress. The Bowery Theater's

²¹ Ibid., 72.

²² Ibid., 65.

²³ Ibid., 71.

²⁴ Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 4-6.

²⁵ Trav S. D., *No Applause*, 40-42.

²⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁷ Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 10-13.

“Arab Girls,” for example, dressed in skimpy costumes and performed acrobatics and balancing acts.²⁸ Also popular were tableaux vivants, in which actresses would pose motionless onstage in imitation of a classic sculpture or painting, usually in a revealing costume like a flesh colored body suit or a toga.²⁹

19th century museums featured a more family-friendly form of early vaudeville. Vaudeville museums developed from America’s earliest museums, especially Charles Willson Peale’s Peale Museum in Philadelphia. Founded in 1786, the Peale Museum featured an art exhibit, a menagerie, a display of minerals, natural history exhibits, historical artifacts, wax figures, natural oddities (such as a five-headed cow), and an auditorium for lectures and dramatic performances.³⁰ Peale’s example proved influential; using Peale as a model, famed showman P. T. Barnum expanded on Peale’s idea of the museum as a form of entertainment when he opened Barnum’s American Museum in Manhattan in 1841. Barnum’s Museum was both educational (with exhibitions of exotic animals and historical artifacts, as well as educational lectures in the lecture room) and entertaining (it also housed circus-style acts and a “freak” show). Most importantly, the museum’s auditorium featured variety-style entertainment without its disreputable elements, such as lewdness, violence, drinking, and prostitution. In this way, Barnum’s Museum was the immediate forerunner of B. F. Keith’s “polite”³¹ vaudeville.³² Dime museums sprang up

²⁸ Gillian M. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

³⁰ Trav S. D., *No Applause*, 56.

³¹ Historians often refer to Keith’s vaudeville as “polite” because it lacked the vulgar elements that characterized the earlier shows. See below for more information on Keith’s innovations.

around the country inspired by the success of Barnum's Museum. Dime museums were divided buildings housing a "freak" show and a variety show.³³ They were noticeably more sleazy than Barnum's original museum had been; they placed more emphasis on the "freak" shows, and many also hosted some discreet prostitution.³⁴ Because aerial acts were out of the question and animal acts were more difficult to stage within the confines of a museum, museum shows placed greater emphasis on musicians, comedians, jugglers, and magicians.³⁵ With its higher salary and relative consistency, museum work proved tempting to many variety entertainers of the day. Unfortunately, these entertainers were often overworked, performing in as many as seventeen shows per day.³⁶ Although less wholesome than Barnum's American Museum, the public still viewed dime museums as relatively safe family entertainment.³⁷ The mixed audiences of men, women, and children led managers of dime museums to ban any suggestive or obscene acts.³⁸

Entertainer and manager Antonio "Tony" Pastor was the most important figure in the early history of vaudeville. Pastor entered show business at an early age; his first public performance was at age six, when he sang at a temperance meeting.³⁹ He soon began his first professional work at Barnum's Museum in Manhattan, which advertised him as a "Child Prodigy."⁴⁰ During these early

³² Ibid., 60-62.

³³ Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 20-23.

³⁴ S. D., *No Applause*, 63.

³⁵ Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 20-23.

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³⁷ S. D., *No Applause*, 63.

³⁸ Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 20-23.

³⁹ Anthony Slide, *The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 390.

⁴⁰ S. D., *No Applause*, 65.

years, Pastor also worked variously as an acrobat, a dancer, and an end man in a minstrel show.⁴¹ By the start of the Civil War, he had entered the nascent variety genre. Pastor's first job in a variety show was in 1860, when he worked as a comic singer at Philadelphia's Melodeon Theater.⁴² His masterful showmanship more than made up for his lack of musical talent; although Pastor's contemporaries would later remember him as a poor singer, he had a long and successful performing career, eventually amassing a repertoire of fifteen hundred songs.⁴³ By the 1860s Pastor was working to remove vaudeville houses' disreputable image, trying especially hard to appeal to middle class patrons and families. He established Tony Pastor's Opera House in the Bowery district of New York City in 1865, advertising it as "fun without vulgarity." Pastor also took the unusual step of having rowdy patrons escorted off the premises.⁴⁴ In 1881, Pastor presided over what historians regard as the birth of clean vaudeville when he staged the first family-friendly variety show at his Fourteenth Street Theater in New York.⁴⁵ During this period, Pastor began using unorthodox methods, like handing out door prizes, to attract a more varied audience. Annie Yeamans, a singer and dancer who worked for Pastor, remembered:

In those days ladies didn't come [to variety houses], and Tony Pastor set about to remedy this state of affairs. It was interesting to see how he accomplished it. He began giving what he called ladies' matinees, and soon got many of them coming to all the performances. At the ladies matinees he used to give away bags of flour as souvenirs, and it was

⁴¹ Slide, *Encyclopedia*, 390.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ S. D., *No Applause*, 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 113.

funny to see the women of the neighborhood carrying away the big packages from the performances. He later got to giving away clocks.⁴⁶

Pastor also appealed to women by presenting female stars, such as Lillian Russell (whom Pastor billed as “The American Beauty”), as icons of femininity and women’s fashion instead of sex objects.⁴⁷

Benjamin Franklin Keith, who began his career as a vaudeville manager in the 1880s, dominated American show business for the duration of the vaudeville era and created the framework for the modern entertainment industry. Keith’s innovations created modern vaudeville by further sanitizing and standardizing vaudeville entertainment; the new shows were endlessly reproducible—a predetermined series of interchangeable acts ran in a continuous loop—and appealed to the widest possible audience. B. F. Keith was born in New Hampshire in 1846. At fourteen, he ran away from home to join the circus. After touring with the circus, Keith began working with dime museums. He opened his first museum, the Gaiety, in Boston in 1883, hiring Edward Albee to manage the museum shortly after opening it. Keith’s partnership with Albee would make the two men the most powerful businessmen in vaudeville. Albee’s genius lay in making vaudeville entertainment as accessible (i.e. cheap) as possible while at the same time giving it a veneer of elegance. He eliminated the museum’s animal exhibits and focused its energy on the variety element by staging bootleg versions of popular operettas and charging very cheap admission. In 1895,

⁴⁶ "Tony Pastor and His Sixty Years on the Stage." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Aug 16, 1908. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/96806698?accountid=4840>.

⁴⁷ S. D., *No Applause*, 68-70.

Albee replaced the word “variety” with the French “vaudeville” to give the shows an air of Continental sophistication.⁴⁸

Keith and Albee’s most consequential innovation was the idea of continuous vaudeville, which they first introduced at the Gaiety Theater in 1895. They borrowed the concept of continuous performance from dime museums, where acts would perform a nonstop loop of around fifteen shows per day.⁴⁹ Continuous vaudeville proved hugely profitable, because it allowed Keith and Albee’s theaters to generate income almost constantly, while traditional theaters only generated income for a few hours each day and spent most of the day accumulating expenses.⁵⁰ Keith would later explain that continuous vaudeville was both highly profitable and an effective marketing tool for his theaters:

It was clear that the majority of people would stay through an entertainment so long as they could, even sitting out acts that had to be repeated. The old form necessitated a final curtain at a specified time, and the emptying of the house. As a result the succeeding audience gathered slowly, the theatre was necessarily dreary as they came into it, and there was nothing going on...Well, that is one of the things that continuous performance does away with. It matters not at what hour of the day or evening you visit, the theatre is always occupied by more or less people, the show is in full swing, everything is bright, cheerful and inviting...I was always maneuvering to keep patrons moving up and down stairs in view of passerby on the sidewalk for the specific purpose of impressing them with the idea that business was immense.⁵¹

The structure of continuous vaudeville (a series of unrelated acts performed in a loop) meant that the management could easily remove unpopular acts.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 72-73.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 85

⁵⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁵¹ B. F. Keith, “The Vogue of the Vaudeville,” in *American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries*, edited by Charles W. Stein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984). Originally published in *National Magazine* 9 (November 1898), 15-16.

Additionally, the rapid-fire pace of the new shows meant that it was very easy to sustain the audience's attention and avoid disappointment.⁵²

Continuous vaudeville led to the explosion of vaudeville as an entertainment industry, rather than a genre confined to urban theaters. It was an efficient system that appealed to as many people as possible by covering as much stylistic ground as possible. As vaudeville historian Trav S. D. writes, Keith and Albee's continuous vaudeville applied industrial production techniques to variety theater, creating shows that were uniform, reproducible, and could be performed virtually anywhere.⁵³ Continuous vaudeville necessarily eliminated most of the early variety shows' spontaneity, and the new shows' need for uniformity led to a corresponding disappearance of the improvised musical cues and accompaniment of variety theater in favor of carefully planned orchestrations. The music for a vaudeville show had to be reproducible anywhere, just like the show itself.

Much like mainstream vaudeville, the development of black vaudeville began with minstrel shows. Blacks had been performing in blackface minstrel shows—mainly for white audiences—since the 1860s.⁵⁴ Although these shows perpetuated negative racial stereotypes, black minstrels improved them somewhat by incorporating elements of authentic African-American culture, like the buck-and-wing and stop-time dances.⁵⁵ The development of minstrelsy had two important effects: first, it led white audiences to become comfortable with

⁵² S. D., *No Applause*, 91-92.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 85

⁵⁴ Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows* (Mentuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

seeing blacks on stage; second, it began white America's enduring fascination with black cultural products. Minstrelsy's popularity led to the development of what Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff call "vaudevillized minstrelsy," or the gradual incorporation of minstrel-show conventions into vaudeville, as traditional minstrelsy declined in popularity in favor of variety shows.⁵⁶

In the late 1890s, the popularity of ragtime and ragtime-derived "coon songs" led many mainstream white vaudeville theaters to book a handful of black performers (known as singles). Comedians Bert Williams and George Walker, songwriter and producer Bob Cole, and comedian Ernest Hogan (composer of the hit song "All Coons Look Alike to Me") were some of the artists who worked in mainstream vaudeville during this period.⁵⁷ White audiences were hungry for black acts and often responded enthusiastically to those few black acts that were able to make their way into the mainstream theatres. Vaudevillian and historian Joe Laurie, Jr. remembered:

With the doors now opened by the cakewalkers and coon shouters, there came to variety many talented Negroes, mostly singers and dancers. Don't know why, but audiences would applaud a Negro dancer with inferior talent more than they would a much better white dancer...⁵⁸

Some all-black companies (known as "big shows") also gained the opportunity to appear on the mainstream vaudeville circuits, where they typically performed a mixture of weeklong engagements in major cities and one-night-

⁵⁶ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African-American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), xi.

⁵⁷ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 38-39.

⁵⁸ Joe Laurie, Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 202.

stands in remote areas. White investors heavily funded these companies in an attempt to satisfy white audiences' demand for black acts while also drawing larger black audiences to segregated mainstream theatres.⁵⁹ The two best known big shows were Ernest Hogan's Smart Set Company and the Black Patti Troubadours. Big shows featured many of the musical comedy elements of white vaudeville shows, but they made heavy use of minstrel-inspired comedy in place of the white shows' more varied ethnic humor, mainly because black comedians could not convincingly imitate European immigrants and Jewish Americans before white audiences. The music in the shows was a mixture of ragtime, popular music, and light opera. Big shows' reliance on minstrel stereotypes allowed them to tour successfully in the South, where minstrel shows were still popular.⁶⁰

At around the same time as black performers were making limited inroads into mainstream vaudeville, black tented minstrelsy developed from the older antebellum and Reconstruction-era minstrel shows, which were performed in theaters. Because of vaudeville's huge popularity, black tent shows also came to offer vaudeville style entertainment that catered to black audiences and spoke to black culture. Tent shows toured throughout the South, including remote areas far from major theatres. These shows, which grew into a beloved Southern tradition and persisted long into the 20th century, commonly featured parades, jazz bands, comedians, dancers, trained animals, and other acts in common with the more traditional vaudeville shows. Allen's New Orleans Minstrels, the

⁵⁹ Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 38.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

Rabbit's Foot Minstrel Company, the Florida Blossom Minstrels, *Silas Green from New Orleans*, and Tolliver's Big Show were the most famous tented minstrel shows.⁶¹

Another, little-known black presence in popular entertainment was in the circus. By the late 19th-century, blacks had been working in circuses for several decades. One of P. T. Barnum's earliest traveling shows, in 1836, featured a black singer and dancer named Sanford.⁶² Barnum's circuses also sometimes featured choruses of black jubilee singers, who performed spirituals. One show included an act referred to as "Charley and Oscar, Zulus."⁶³ Most of the major circuses toured with their own all-black sideshow band and minstrel troupe. Under the sideshow tent, singers, dancers, comedians, and specialty acts performed vaudeville-style entertainment, accompanied by all-black bands.⁶⁴ Sideshow vaudeville incorporated many elements of the old minstrel shows, with performers sometimes appearing in blackface.⁶⁵ Like big shows and tented minstrel shows, sideshow troupes often developed loyal followings from the black communities in cities where they performed.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid., 6-7.

⁶² Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African-American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 374.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 158-159.

⁶⁵ Garvin Bushell (as told to Mark Tucker), *Jazz from the Beginning* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 13.

⁶⁶ Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 161.

Chapter 2: Jazz in Vaudeville, Beginnings to 1917

The variety theaters of the 1870s and 80s were usually small and often had only a pianist to play the cues, incidental music, and accompaniment for all of the acts. Many of these piano accompanists were skilled non-reading musicians. Vaudevillian Joe Laurie claimed that many of the piano players in those days did not read music, but that “about 80 per cent of all the old time piano players could fake anything you could sing, hum, or whistle.”⁶⁷ Both reading and non-reading pianists in early vaudeville theaters likely made extensive use of improvisation while accompanying a show, either to invent completely new accompaniment (as non-reading pianists would have done) or to make additions to preexisting sheet music. Embellishing the melody line or thickening the harmonic texture of a given piece of sheet music would have created a larger sound and helped to make up for the lack of more extensive instrumentation. Joe Laurie remembered that Mike Bernard, the pianist in one of Tony Pastor’s early vaudeville houses, “manipulated the ivories so that the average pop song sounded like grand opera...He did what the professors would call ‘extemporizing,’ but what me and Aggie would call ‘ad-libbing’ on the keys.”⁶⁸ Pioneer jazz composer and pianist Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, who spent most of his early career working in vaudeville, echoed this idea when describing his

⁶⁷ Joe Laurie Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

own jazz piano style: “No jazz piano player can really play good jazz unless they try to give an imitation of a band...”⁶⁹

In his description of early vaudeville piano playing, Laurie draws connections between the piano styles of vaudeville pianists who worked in Tony Pastor’s theater and ragtime. The aforementioned Mike Bernard was evidently an outstanding ragtime pianist, and “won a flock of medals at Tammany Hall, where they would hold yearly ragtime piano-playing contests.”⁷⁰ Slightly later, Ben Harney, another influential ragtime pianist, would take the accompanist job at Tony Pastor’s theater:

Ben Harney was the pioneer of ragtime music. Modern jazz and swing stemmed from the same syncopation. His playing led to the ragtime craze and the cakewalk craze using the same tempo...Ben learned [ragtime] when he was in Louisville, mastered the syncopated rhythm, and came to Pastor’s about 1895.⁷¹

Harney, a light-skinned black man who passed for white to work in Pastor’s theater,⁷² was extremely important for his role in popularizing ragtime. As the *New York Times* wrote in 1924, “...credit is due [Harney] because he played in a first-class theatre before any other ragtime exponent.”⁷³ Harney also published the first ragtime instruction manual, *Ragtime Instructor*, in 1897.⁷⁴ He was very competitors challenged his position as originator of ragtime, Harney offered to leave the music business and pay one hundred dollars to anyone who could

⁶⁹ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor of Jazz”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 63.

⁷⁰ Joe Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷² Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 24.

⁷³ “The Origin of Ragtime,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1924; Berlin, *Ragtime*, 24.

⁷⁴ Berlin, *Ragtime*, 24.

present a rag older than his 1895 *You've Been a Good Old Wagon but You've Done Broke Down*.⁷⁵

Given the contemporary popularity of ragtime and their own experience with the style, Ben Harney, Mike Bernard, and the other ragtime pianists who worked in vaudeville houses probably accompanied shows either by improvising new, ragtime-based parts or by adding improvised syncopation to a preexisting musical material. The practice of adding syncopation to unsyncopated material was known as “ragging.” Ragtime pianists often ragged pop tunes, marches, and, in a particularly subversive practice, well-known pieces of classical music. Critics often referred to this last practice, known as “ragging the classics,” as a disgrace, but it was a reliable crowd-pleaser; pianists Jelly Roll Morton, Eubie Blake, and James P. Johnson all included classical pieces in their ragtime repertoires.⁷⁶ One 1899 account describes Ben Harney ragging a few pieces, demonstrating that he was a fluent ragtime improviser: “[Harney’s] performances included the ‘ragging’ of such popular classics as Mendelssohn’s *Spring Song*, Rubinstein’s *Melody in F*, and the *Intermezzo* from Mascagni’s ‘Cavalleria Rusticana,’ which he would first play in their orthodox form. The effect was startling.”⁷⁷ It was probably not unusual, then, for Harney and other vaudeville accompanists to render sheet music in a ragtime style.

Some vaudeville houses had small orchestras, usually of no more than seven pieces, to accompany their shows. These early vaudeville orchestras likely played a mixture of written and improvised music, depending on the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 67-70.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 67.

situation. A number of surviving repertoire books from Tony Pastor's theater provide clues to the instrumentation and repertoire of vaudeville orchestras. The songs are typically arranged for two violins, trumpet, trombone, flute, and drums. Each instrument has its own bound book of scores, suggesting that the orchestra members would have read the music during the show.⁷⁸ Touring acts that performed in Pastor's theater probably left behind the surviving arrangements. The music covers a wide variety of genres and styles, including parody songs, sentimental material, and folk songs such as "Irish Washerwoman" and "Garry Owen."⁷⁹ The parody songs are humorous reworked versions of familiar popular songs, and singers probably used the "ethnic" folk songs like "Irish Washerwoman" and various German-inspired tunes in the "Irish" or "Dutch" acts that were widely popular in vaudeville at the time.⁸⁰ These remnants are only part of the story and may not be an accurate representation of performance practice; written arrangements such as those described were a basic framework on which to build a performance. Singers or orchestra directors could alter them to accommodate differences in instrumentation in a particular orchestra or to compensate for an entertainer's lack of singing ability.⁸¹

Musicians in the early vaudeville orchestras were remarkably versatile; they had to be able to sight-read any scores that a traveling act might bring with them while also improvising music to accompany those portions of the show that

⁷⁸ Gillian M. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: The University of Illinois Press, 2010), 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

did not include written parts. Vaudeville historian Douglas Gilbert writes that the early vaudeville orchestras were “extraordinarily good”:

Actors almost never carried their own orchestration, except for a specialty. Music for end songs, singles, and fill-ins was left to the ingenuity of the orchestra. The absence of technique and the hit-or-miss attitude of the actor (based upon the belief that a mummer’s life was but an interim of earthly ad-libbing) often taxed the abilities of the musicians...All of them had to be good readers and improvisers. Many of them were not only fine soloists, but well grounded in harmony, counterpoint, and form.⁸²

Improvisation occurred throughout a show, with the members of the orchestra filling in those segments that had no written scores. To facilitate this practice, vaudeville orchestras sometimes used cue sheets that gave instructions on where to add sound effects or appropriate music. A typical cue sheet from an early vaudeville show gave vary basic instructions for cues, such as “hurry music,” “frenzied music,” and “clarinet squeal.” For the rising curtain at the start of a show, a cue sheet might require that the orchestra play “lively music.”⁸³

Probably the most important factor that allowed these orchestras to play coherently was a shared repertoire of memorized musical material, including clogs, hornpipes, reels, and jigs, which the musicians could “fake” in any key.⁸⁴ This shared repertoire suggests that rather than playing completely extemporaneously, early vaudeville orchestras created rudimentary orchestrations based on tunes with which they were all intimately familiar and which would fit a given situation onstage.

The disappearance of improvised cueing in mainstream vaudeville was a side effect of B. F. Keith’s sanitized entertainment. Keith’s insistence on the

⁸² Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

removal of impolite elements from variety performance also led to formalized-through composed orchestral accompaniment and the disappearance of improvised cues, except under very specific circumstances. This change was a natural result of changes in performance practice among vaudeville entertainers. First, Keith's insistence on precision and professionalism in his troupes meant that actors were likely to follow the script exactly; musicians no longer had to be prepared to accompany a surprise change in the program, so all of the music could be prepared in advance. Second, the greater attention that orchestra leaders paid to musical accuracy may have been a side effect of what Keith called "the closer attention paid to stage setting and scenic embellishment generally" and his avoidance of what he labeled "coarseness."⁸⁵ Gilbert notes this important change in his history of vaudeville:

In the early days music cues were incessant. The actors were so continually spattered with them it was hard to deliver an important line or make a significant gesture without being slapped in the ears by one. The actors raged, for often the audience could not hear the lines, but the practice continued until the cues became such a nuisance they had to be restricted to precise business. This was one of the few 'refinements' of Keith and his 'polite vaudeville' colleagues that was really helpful.⁸⁶

If vaudeville was to become respectable and family-friendly, vaudeville music needed to be cleaner and more refined. The spontaneity that characterized the early variety house orchestras (and early vaudeville generally) had become a liability.

⁸⁵ B. F. Keith, "The Vogue of the Vaudeville," in *American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries*, edited by Charles W. Stein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 20; Originally published in *National Magazine* 9 (November 1898), 146-153.

⁸⁶ Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 33.

Because the all-black “Big Shows” like the Black Patti Troubadours and the Smart Set performed in mainstream theaters on white vaudeville circuits, many of which were owned by B. F. Keith, they made use of through-composed music, like the white “polite vaudeville” troupes. Beyond a need to conform to the expectations of mainstream vaudeville, the troupes may have had another reason to strive for precision. As black entertainers performing for mostly-white audiences at the turn of the 20th century, often called the “nadir of American race relations,” the Big Shows must have wanted to present a sophisticated and respectable image that would refute negative stereotypes of blacks in popular culture. The *Indianapolis Freeman’s* review of *Abyssinia*, a black musical that toured mainstream vaudeville theaters in the teens, displays an undercurrent of racial pride and demonstrates the importance of written scores in these productions:

...‘Abyssinia’ is indeed a Negro play to be proud of, and the grand and diversified score of music composed and arranged by Prof. Will Marion Cooke...Bert Williams and...George W. Walker, along with Jesse A. Shipp and a few other colored writers and performers are to be credited with the final accomplishment of founding and substantiating a new school of American comedy and also of music.⁸⁷

In addition to concerns with ideology and conformity, there were practical reasons for the Big Shows’ formalized music. The classical-music-influenced pieces often featured in the shows made written scores more important for the orchestra. This was especially true of the Black Patti Troubadours, which

⁸⁷ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 64.

featured the operatic work of black soprano Sissieretta Jones, the titular Black Patti.

Small-time black vaudeville troupes, which operated largely in the black community, away from Keith's scrutiny, escaped his "polite vaudeville" reforms. They sometimes presented suggestive songs and skits, and their orchestras probably continued to play a mixture of improvised music and sheet music during shows, in the manner of the early white vaudeville orchestras. These *Indianapolis Freeman*⁸⁸ classified ads from the early teens, which specify that all applicants must both read music and improvise, illustrate that musicians in black vaudeville were still performing in the old style:

AT LIBERTY! Clarinet, Piano, Saxophone That can Read, Improvise, Transpose, and Fake. An experienced showman, vaudeville, stock or road...⁸⁹

WANTED! To Strengthen Band by Dixie Serenaders...trombone to double, read, and fake...⁹⁰

The incipient practice of jazz improvisation, which was appearing in black communities around the South by the early 20th century, fit neatly into the preexisting tradition of ensemble improvisation in vaudeville. Many influential but little-known early jazz musicians worked as orchestra leaders for small-time touring black vaudeville companies beginning in the first decade of the 20th

⁸⁸ I rely on the *Indianapolis Freeman* as a primary source throughout this chapter. The *Freeman* is unique in that it was among the earliest black newspapers to provide regular entertainment coverage, and sometimes-featured dispatches from entertainment reporters in smaller cities throughout the South. This provides the researcher with rare information on music in southern black communities that is unavailable elsewhere.

⁸⁹ Advertisement by Louis Pierce, *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 27, 1911.

⁹⁰ Advertisement by F. X. Ralphe, *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 11, 1914.

century, when the Big Shows were also at the height of their popularity. Interestingly, most of the orchestra leaders who later became prominent in jazz circles were clarinet players; the most revered included William “King” Phillips, Fred Kewley, and Wilbur Sweatman. Phillips was an influential but semi-legendary figure among early jazz clarinetists and little is known about his background. He was born in Louisville, Kentucky,⁹¹ a product of the same thriving ragtime community that produced Ben Harney.⁹² He rose to prominence while playing with vaudeville bands. Phillips was professionally active by 1907, when, according to the *Indianapolis Freeman*, he was playing clarinet with the Funny Folks Comedy Co. under the direction of bandmaster J. C. Turner. Interestingly, he was not yet billed as “King;” the *Freeman* correspondent refers to him simply as “William Phillips.”⁹³ Phillips was being called “King” by 1909, when the *Freeman* mentions him again in a regional dispatch. The article does not mention him as part of a touring company, meaning that he may have settled temporarily in Clarksdale, Mississippi.⁹⁴

Starting in 1909 and continuing throughout the teens, Phillips became busy playing with touring companies, including A. G. Allen’s Minstrels and W. C. Handy’s circus band.⁹⁵ He also became well known as a composer during this period and was especially popular among circus and vaudeville bands; in 1915, R. Roy Pope’s band featured three of his pieces: “The Florida Blues,” “Eagle

⁹¹ Walter Allen and Brian Rust (Revised by Laurie Wright), *“King” Oliver* (Essex, UK: Storyville Publications and Co. Ltd., 1987), 8

⁹² Joe Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 62.

⁹³ “Funny Folks Comedy Co,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 6, 1907.

⁹⁴ “Clarksdale, Miss,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, June 26, 1909.

⁹⁵ Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 135.

Rock Rag,” and “High Ball Rag.” J. E. Wolfscale’s band also featured “The Florida Blues” in 1915.⁹⁶ From 1919 to January 1920, Phillips was in Chicago. He was Sidney Bechet’s replacement in King Oliver’s jazz band after Bechet left to tour Europe with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra.⁹⁷ Oliver specifically requested that Phillips leave W. C. Handy’s group, where he was currently working, and join him in Chicago.⁹⁸ That King Oliver, by then a renowned jazz cornetist with years of touring and performing experience, would send for Phillips suggests that Phillips had a formidable reputation as an improviser by the late teens. Phillips’s contemporaries have confirmed this point. In an interview with Laurie Wright, early jazz musician Preston Jackson said that King Phillips’ playing style was very similar to that of Johnny Dodds, and that Phillips was as good a musician as Dodds was.⁹⁹ Jazz scholars and critics regard Dodds, who recorded with such jazz luminaries as Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and King Oliver, as one of the greatest jazz clarinetists of the 1920s. Clarinetist Buster Bailey, a veteran of the King Oliver and Fletcher Henderson bands, remembered Phillips years later as “one of the first jazz clarinet players I ever heard.”¹⁰⁰

Fred Kewley, another jazz clarinetist who worked extensively in vaudeville, was born in British Guiana, where he received formal musical training by two

⁹⁶ Ibid., 166-170.

⁹⁷ Allen and Rust, “*King*” *Oliver*, 8.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 77.

bandmasters from the Kneller Hall College of Music in London.¹⁰¹ Kewley was working as a professional musician by 1909, when he was traveling with Pat Chappelle's *A Rabbit's Foot Company*.¹⁰² From 1909 to 1911, Kewley worked with A. G. Allen's Minstrels, together with William "King" Phillips; the two men played together in the troupe's saxophone quartet.¹⁰³ In 1911, he joined Eph. Williams' Big City Minstrels. Kewley married his wife Elizabeth in 1912, and the two of them toured with the *Silas Green from New Orleans Company* in 1914. Kewley joined Alexander Tolliver's heavily jazz-oriented group in 1916. While working with Tolliver, he played with fellow jazz musicians Willie Hightower, Alvin "Zoo" Robertson, and David Jones. Like "King" Phillips, his playing made a lasting impression on all who heard it; Kewley was billed as the "best colored clarinetist" in the *Indianapolis Freeman*,¹⁰⁴ and clarinetist Garvin Bushell later remembered him as the best black clarinet player in the country in the teens.¹⁰⁵

The most famous and influential of the great black vaudeville clarinetists was Wilbur C. Sweatman. Sweatman was born on February 7, 1882 in Brunswick, Missouri to Coleman and Matilda Sweatman.¹⁰⁶ He started playing music at a young age after his older sister Eva, who later became a music teacher, taught him to play the piano. In the next few years, Sweatman taught himself to play the violin and then the clarinet.¹⁰⁷ During Sweatman's childhood in

¹⁰¹ "Fred Kewley," *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 16, 1916; Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 136.

¹⁰² Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 135.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ "Fred Kewley," *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 16, 1916; Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 136.

¹⁰⁵ Garvin Bushell (as told to Mark Tucker), *Jazz from the Beginning* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 13.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Berresford, *That's Got 'Em! The Life and Music of Wilbur C. Sweatman* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 12

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

the 1880s and 90s, ragtime was developing nearby in Sedalia, Missouri, then home to Scott Joplin. Sweatman would likely have heard the new music from traveling ragtime pianists and ragtime bands that passed through Brunswick. Ragtime was the most important influence on Sweatman's playing, and he continued to play in a ragtime style long after the music itself fell out of fashion.¹⁰⁸ Another of Sweatman's formative musical experiences came in 1894, when he saw a group of West African singers and dancers perform in Kansas City. The performers had come to Chicago for the 1893 World's Fair and had embarked on a short tour of the Midwest immediately after the end of the Fair. The performance evidently made a deep impression on Sweatman, as he was able to clearly remember it more than sixty years later in a 1959 interview with Len Kunstadt for *Record Research*.¹⁰⁹

Sweatman's professional career began around 1895, when he joined Kansas bandmaster Nathaniel Clark Smith's "Pickaninny Band." An influential music teacher, Smith was sometimes called "America's greatest colored bandmaster" by the contemporary press.¹¹⁰ After finishing his education in London, Smith became a prominent music educator and musician, serving as a National Guard bandmaster and music director at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute.¹¹¹ While working as a music teacher, Smith taught many students who later rose to fame as jazz musicians, including Earl Hines, Bennie Moten, Walter Page, Ray Nance, Milt Hinton, Lionel Hampton, and Cab

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 18-20.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 18.

Calloway.¹¹² “Pickaninny acts,” or “pick acts,” including groups like Smith’s band, were one of the main avenues that young black performers used to enter show business in the early 20th century. “Pick acts” were often featured in mainstream white vaudeville as a means of adding variety to mainly-white shows. These groups mainly worked with female entertainers like Sophie Tucker and May Irwin.¹¹³ “Pick acts” featured singers, dancer, and sometimes instrumentalists, billed as “Pickaninny bands.”¹¹⁴ Probably the most famous entertainer to come out of a “pickaninny act” was legendary dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson. N. C. Smith’s band was well-rehearsed and respected for its musicianship; according to the November 2, 1895 *Leavenworth Herald*, John Philip Sousa called the “Pickaninny Band” the “best kid band in the world.”¹¹⁵ Sweatman was probably with the band in 1899, when it toured Australia and the South Pacific with the famous vaudeville entertainer and songwriter Ernest Hogan.¹¹⁶

In 1902, Sweatman joined P. G. Lowery’s Concert Band, which was then touring the country with the Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus sideshow. Sweatman did double duty, playing violin in the orchestra as the orchestra leader and playing clarinet in Lowery’s concert band.¹¹⁷ This job honed both Sweatman’s music reading and his improvisational skills. During the shows, he would have had to read Lowery’s arrangements of marches, waltzes, and popular songs while also improvising to “follow” the acts onstage. Judging by

¹¹² Ibid., 17.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 21-24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

black entertainer Tom Fletcher's account of seeing Sweatman in the early 1900s, he also probably improvised throughout the band's pre-circus parades:

[Lowery's band] made the parade in New York and the season Sweatman was with the band the crowds that lined the side walks started following the band just to hear Sweatman playing his clarinet. Everybody was saying that they had never heard anybody play the instrument like that before. Sweatman was the sensation of the parade.¹¹⁸

The above account, especially when read in light of Sweatman's later claims to have invented jazz, strongly suggests that Sweatman was engaged in an early form of jazz improvisation; it is unlikely that a faithful realization of a standard marching band clarinet part would have caused such a "sensation," as Fletcher puts it.

After spending a season with Lowery's Concert Band, Sweatman left to join Mahara's Minstrels, playing in a band under the direction of W. C. Handy. Composer and virtuoso cornetist Handy would soon become famous as the "Father of the Blues."¹¹⁹ During his stay with Mahara's Minstrels, Sweatman developed his oft-maligned trick of playing Ethelbert Nevin's "The Rosary" on three clarinets simultaneously. The stunt would become his signature for the rest of his long career in show business.¹²⁰

Sweatman left Handy's group in 1903 to lead an orchestra at the Palace Museum in Minneapolis. The Palace, a dime museum, was billed as "THE ANCHORAGE FOR THE WORLD'S MARVELS—A SHELTER FOR NATURE'S ODDITIES" and also housed a "freak show." Sweatman's band performed in one of the Palace's two theaters. In 1903, he made his first recordings at a local

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 27-32.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 37-38

music store, which included the first recorded version of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag." Unfortunately, few cylinders were issued at the time and no copies of these recordings now exist. Because of the limited distribution of the recording company and the nature of the early cylinder recording process (each individual recording had to be played and cut separately), all copies of Sweatman's first cylinders probably disappeared years ago. Between 1907 and 1908 Sweatman also toured around Minnesota and Wisconsin, where he played short engagements with various small companies.¹²¹

When he moved to Chicago in 1908 to work as music director at the Grand Theater, Sweatman found the largest audience yet for what evidence suggests was his very early form of jazz. While working at the Grand, Sweatman played clarinet in a trio which also included piano and drums.¹²² Sweatman's playing created quite a stir, just as it had several years earlier in Lowery's concert band, and many people who heard him during this period would recall later that he was among the first to play jazz. In a 1925 article for the *Chicago Defender*, bandleader Dave Peyton remembered:

In 1906 [sic] Mr. Sweatman played in a little picture house on S. State St., in Chicago, called 'The Little Grand Theater.' In the orchestra were three players—piano, drums and clarinet. Mr. Sweatman led the band with the clarinet and was a sensation. White players would come to his little house from all over the country to hear Sweatman moan on the clarinet, and many of them would engage him to teach them how to do it.

His work at this house made it famous nationally, as all of the musical papers spoke of this peculiar clarinetist. Little did we think that Mr. Sweatman's original style of playing would be adopted by the greatest jazz artists of today; but it is and Mr. Sweatman can claim the honour of being the first to establish it.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid., 40-44.

¹²² Ibid., 50.

¹²³ Ibid. 51-52.

Theatrical agent Harrison Smith also said that Sweatman's band at the Grand Theater was "the talk of the town long before the arrival of the Creole Band," implying that it was Sweatman, and not the Creole Band which played in Chicago several years later, who introduced jazz to the city.¹²⁴ In January 1911, Sweatman left the Grand and moved to the Monogram Theater. He played in Chicago's vaudeville theaters for a total of three years before he began working in the touring vaudeville circuits. After leaving Chicago, he continued to popularize early jazz, at first working exclusively in black theaters and small white theaters. Starting in 1912, he began working in mainstream white vaudeville, playing in major theaters as far north as Canada.¹²⁵

In December 1916, Sweatman made his historic recording of his composition "Down Home Rag," probably the earliest surviving recording of jazz improvisation. Sweatman, accompanied by a small group of studio musicians, recorded "My Hawaiian Sunshine" and "Down Home Rag" for the Emerson Phonograph Company in Manhattan. "Down Home Rag," which was popular enough to merit three printings between 1911 and 1913,¹²⁶ is a typical example of a late-period rag. It features a multithematic construction, with a four-bar introduction and a four-bar interlude before the trio; the interlude modulates to the subdominant.¹²⁷

I

IV

¹²⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 66-74.

¹²⁶ Berlin, *Ragtime*, 149.

¹²⁷ Wilber C. Sweatman, *Down Home Rag* (Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1911).

Intro AABBA Interlude CCDDC

“Down Home Rag,” like other rags from the 1910s, features frequent use of dotted rhythms in the A and B themes, instead of the eighth-note rhythms common in rags from the previous decade. This change in rhythm reflects the increased popularity and influence of the fox trot and the turkey trot, which featured dotted rhythms.¹²⁸

On his 1916 recording, Sweatman makes several alterations to the original composition as defined by the published sheet music from 1911. He shortens the form, probably in an effort to conform to the short playing time of Emerson’s small disks. Beginning with the repeated B section, Sweatman makes significant departures from the melody, usually on repeated sections. Sweatman’s improvisations are most noticeable on the repeated C and D sections, where he scarcely plays the melody at all. The form of Sweatman’s 1916 Emerson version of “Down Home Rag” is something like this:¹²⁹

I

IV

Intro (Orchestra) AABB’ Interlude CC’DD’C”

A comparison of the 1911 published version of “Down Home Rag” and Sweatman’s 1916 recording shows that the Emerson recording is not only the first jazz recording, but also an example of the energetic improvisation that thrilled Sweatman’s audiences beginning in the early 1900s, when he was working with P. G. Lowery. “Down Home Rag” is one of the few recorded examples of jazz improvisation as it would have occurred in a vaudeville context.

¹²⁸ Berlin, *Ragtime*, 149.

¹²⁹ Wilbur C. Sweatman, *Down Home Rag*, Wilbur C. Sweatman accompanied by Emerson Trio, Emerson 5163, mx. 1201, take 1, ca. Dec. 1916.

Despite their importance to music history, Sweatman's Emerson recordings remain little known. They are obscure for two reasons. First, the Emerson Company recorded using unusual small (six or seven-inch) disks that featured nonstandard "universal cut" grooves; the company meant the disks to be playable on any of the popular phonograph models, such as Victor, Columbia, or Edison. Unfortunately, this innovation led to slow sales of Emerson recordings, because consumers were unfamiliar and somewhat suspicious of "universal" disks. To make matters worse, the Sweatman's Emerson recordings received a very limited release of no more than two years.¹³⁰ For these reasons, copies of Sweatman's recording of "Down Home Rag" are rare, and scholars rarely discuss its importance.

In addition to the outstanding solo work of musicians like Phillips, Kewley, and Sweatman, jazz improvisation may also have appeared in several other contexts in small-time black vaudeville. Traveling vaudeville troupes often performed street parades, like the one in which Tom Fletcher remembered seeing Wilbur Sweatman, to draw the attention of the local populace when they arrived in a new town. These street parades were part of a tradition of pre-show advertising that dated back to the early days of vaudeville. "Frequently," Gilbert Douglas writes, "the musicians played on the street in front of the theater before the show opened."¹³¹ The musicians meant their performance to attract a crowd, possibly enticing them to attend one of the performances in the theater. Visiting

¹³⁰ Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 342.

¹³¹ Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 32-33.

troupes would typically stage their parades on the main street of the town in which they had arrived; the uniformed musicians would march down the street in formation, playing a popular tune. The music in these parades evidently featured at least a limited amount of improvisation, as suggested by Tom Fletcher's anecdote on Sweatman and this description of a vaudeville parade from the *Indianapolis Freeman*:

Promptly at 11:30 the mournful sound of a bugle call from the rear end of car number 7 (Atlanta) was the warning for parade time. A few moments later a lineup of beautiful long red coats with large Pearl buttons and high silk hats including a number of high brown Soubrettes were waiting for the tap of the drum. Very soon the Big concert band of 20 (the equestrienne) was on its way to the heart of a city that has no heart. A large crowd greeted the merry-makers. Suddenly a thunderous roar of an introduction was heard. Then the shriek of a trombone following the Grand Pause rattled off a cadenza for 'Old Kentucky Home' (a trombone solo)...¹³²

The reporter's description of a "rattled off" "cadenza" by the trombonist implies that he improvised briefly before playing the melody of "Old Kentucky Home." That performances of "Old Kentucky Home" do not usually feature such an introduction, and the reporter's use of the word "cadenza," often used as a description of improvisatory material in Western art music, further support this conclusion.

Small-time black vaudeville shows may have sometimes featured improvised music under the catchall heading of "novelty acts." Some novelty acts involved some sort of musical element, such as playing homemade instruments or playing traditional instruments in unusual ways, as in Wilbur

¹³² "Campbell's New Orleans Minstrels," *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 20, 1916.

Sweatman's three-clarinet stunt. A 1911 *Indianapolis Freeman* dispatch raises the possibility that some novelty acts made use of jazz improvisation:

Messrs. Fred Kewley, Robert Miller and Robt. H. Gant recently joined hands in a new musical act. Mr. Kewley posing as the professor, Mr. Gant as a musician looking for work and Mr. Miller doing comedy. Taken all in all, the act is a complete success from beginning to end...¹³³

Although the article makes no mention of the actual selections that Kewley played (or if he played at all) in this musical act, that he was at the time one of the most respected black clarinetists makes it unlikely that he would have participated in a musical act without playing. Additionally, given that he was onstage, it is unlikely that he would have been reading sheet music while also attempting to act.

The small vaudeville troupes and bands that performed in circus sideshows were also important in the development of many jazz musicians' careers during these years. Black circus bandleaders, especially the most prominent ones, like P. G. Lowery, R. Roy Pope, and J. E. Wolfscale, prided themselves on the discipline and refined musicianship of their bands, probably to counteract the demeaning minstrel-show conditions in which they worked. P. G. Lowery's Concert Band and Minstrel Company's repertoire included classical overtures, marches, waltzes, and patriotic compositions, as well as the popular ragtime pieces of the day.¹³⁴ Lowery was a friend of Scott Joplin and visited him at his home in November 1901. He also used his circus band to popularize Joplin's music; Lowery's Concert Band performed Joplin's "Sunflower Slow Drag"

¹³³ "Aboard A. G. Allen's Private Car '999'," *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 18, 1911.

¹³⁴ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 159.

in its 1901 tour and Joplin's "A Breeze from Alabama," which Joplin dedicated to Lowery¹³⁵, on its 1902 tour. "The late composition by Scott Joplin, 'A Breeze from Alabama,'" Lowery wrote the *Freeman* that year, "is a hit every where. It is fast growing popular."¹³⁶

The best of the circus bands were always seeking legitimacy and respect for their artistry. While working with Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey, J. E. Wolfscale's band reached the unheard-of size of thirty-two pieces, making it the largest circus band then on the road.¹³⁷ It was also well-rehearsed; the *Indianapolis Freeman* praised this group in a 1914 article, stating that "Prof. Wolfscale has shown the management of the greatest show on earth that with a big number of colored musicians you can play concert music and other kinds and with as much expression as the big show's concert band."¹³⁸ Bandleader R. Roy Pope was the first to completely eschew minstrelsy in his sideshow work, as a *Freeman* correspondent noted in January 1911: "This aggregation...will by persistent efforts of the efficient band director and cornetist, Prof. R. Roy Pope, carry an exclusive concert band without minstrel...this season [Pope] takes the initiative in eliminating the minstrel part."¹³⁹ A contemporary editorial that appeared in the *Freeman* a year later illustrates the way that the black community viewed Pope's striving for dignity in his work:

¹³⁵ Clifford Edward Watkins, *Showman: The Life and Music of Perry George Lowery* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 46.

¹³⁶ *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 6, 1902; *Ibid.*, 45-46.

¹³⁷ Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 168.

¹³⁸ "Notes From Wolfscale's Band, With Barnum and Bailey," *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 8, 1914; Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 168.

¹³⁹ "Negro Concert Band With Ringling Bros.' Circus," *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 21, 1911; *Ragged but Right*, 164.

In each and every city Prof. Pope is highly praised for having the best band of its size ever traveling with a circus...both in appearance and conduct and ability. It would be very nice, indeed, if some of our other colored band leaders would drop that old 'Befo' De Wah' dope and advance as the world does... [Bandleaders should] try and help the world forget forty-five years ago.¹⁴⁰

In keeping with the idea that circus bands should try to present a dignified and disciplined approach to black musicianship, most of the high-level circus bandleaders insisted that their musicians read music. Entertainer Tom Fletcher remembers that:

"When you joined a show as a musician there was never any band rehearsal. The band leader, when parade time came, would pass out the books that had all of the tunes, but with the names of the tunes cut off. The idea was to see whether you had told the truth about being a bandsman. When everyone had his book the leader would give the signal to start playing the march. [Then the leader] would get a chance to see who was cheating or who wasn't a good music reader.

Less prominent sideshow bands appear to have been less demanding about the reading ability of their musicians and probably made considerable use of improvisation and playing by ear. According to a correspondent from the *Freeman*, indiscriminate improvisation from musicians in sideshow bands had become a nuisance by the mid teens: "...as a rule most side show managers just want noise from a colored band. The reason for this is because they don't have a large enough band to do anything but jam."¹⁴¹ Clarinetist Garvin Bushell spoke of playing what sounded like very rough arrangements of popular songs and blues during his time in the Sells-Floto Circus; material like this also could have included ample room for melodic embellishment and improvisation:

¹⁴⁰ "Notes from Ringling Bros.' Circus Annex," *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 20, 1912; *Ragged but Right*, 164.

¹⁴¹ "Notes From Wolfscale's Band, With Barnum and Bailey," *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 8, 1914; Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 168.

When we arrived in a town we'd ride on a wagon for the parade and play "Beale Street Blues" or "The Memphis Blues" or "The Entertainer" in fast tempo, or else some old military marches. Other bands played them two to the bar, we'd play them four to the bar... We played "Rubber-necked Moon," out of the *Smart Set* show, "How Do You Do, Miss Mandy?," and "Snag It," which Joe Oliver used to play.¹⁴²

The long list of jazz musicians who received their early training in circus bands supports the idea that circus bands made some use of improvisation during performances. Wilbur Sweatman, Willie "Bunk" Johnson, Willie Hightower, Alvin "Zoo" Robertson, Lorenzo Tio Sr., Charles Creath, Jasper Taylor, and Buddy Petit all spent time touring with circuses. In the 1980s, long after circus bands had faded from popularity, Garvin Bushell would remember:

"There were some great black clarinet players with circuses in those days. Percy Glascoe from Baltimore was one, and Fred Kewley from Detroit was another. Outside of players in the Jenkins' Orphanage Band, Kewley was the best black clarinet player in the country... Those guys had a style of clarinet playing that's been forgotten. Ernest Elliott had it, Jimmy O'Bryant had it, and Johnny Dodds had it."¹⁴³

Bushell's memories of circus clarinetists specifically associate them with later, more well known jazz clarinetists such as Johnny Dodds, further strengthening the idea that music resembling early jazz was present in the music of the black circus bands. And, when taken with Preston Jackson's comparison of William "King" Smith's playing style to Johnny Dodds's, it raises the interesting possibility that Johnny Dodds's recordings (together with those of Wilbur Sweatman) are some of the closest things modern researchers have to recorded examples of circus and vaudeville clarinet style.

¹⁴² Garvin Bushell (as told to Mark Tucker), *Jazz from the Beginning* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 11-12.

¹⁴³ Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, 13.

Chapter 3: Jazz in Vaudeville, 1917-1940

The Creole Band was the first jazz ensemble to work in mainstream vaudeville. It consisted of New Orleans musicians who had relocated to California between 1908 and 1914,¹⁴⁴ including bassist William Johnson, violinist Jimmy Palao, trombonist Eddie Vincent, guitarist Norwood Williams, cornetist Freddie Keppard, and, at various times, clarinetists George Baquet, Louis Delille, and Jimmy Noone. Johnson organized the band and served as its manager.¹⁴⁵ The Creole Band also featured the singing and dancing of entertainer Henry Morgan Prince, who left in early 1917.¹⁴⁶ They toured vaudeville from 1914 to 1918.¹⁴⁷

The Creole Band began working in vaudeville after two of vaudeville manager Alexander Pantages' assistant managers heard them perform at a boxing match at Doyle's Training Camp in Vernon, California, just outside of Los Angeles.¹⁴⁸ The Pantages theater chain, though not an organization on the level of the Keith or Orpheum circuits, was a major force in vaudeville in the western United States and Canada, from California to Kansas City and as far north as Vancouver and Manitoba.¹⁴⁹ The Creole Band traveled the Pantages circuit with four other acts: an "Irish" act, a novelty dancer, a juvenile act featuring chorus girls, and a singing act centered around baseball. Pantages bundled multiple

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61-78.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-59.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-53.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88-95.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

acts together for more efficient travel over the long distances between the theaters on his circuit.¹⁵⁰

The band's act drew heavily on old minstrel show routines and conventions. They performed in front of a "plantation" backdrop, which depicted a cotton field, a river, a cornfield, a church, and a log cabin. Henry Morgan Prince donned blackface, dressed as an old man, and performed an energetic buck-and-wing¹⁵¹ with a live chicken. The instrumentalists sang in four-part harmony and performed a repertoire including "Egyptia," "Old Black Joe," and "Ballin' the Jack."¹⁵² That a band as exciting and original as the Creole Band had to package its music in a hackneyed minstrel show routine brings up an interesting point about jazz's place in vaudeville. Even after jazz became a popular music for dancing and listening in the late teens, jazz bands in vaudeville did not exist as strictly musical acts, but rather as one part of a more elaborate act that might include a dancer, singer, or comedian. Historian Lawrence Gushee wrote that

Musical acts—that is, ones based on the playing of a collection of instruments—were pretty much obligated to have gimmicks, such as elaborate, often exotic, costumes or peculiar instruments, or to present their acts in a kind of choreography. The lesson that had to be learned was that the vaudeville audience was not there to be edified, as at a concert, but to be entertained. And music without words is not that entertaining by itself.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁵¹ According to Marshall and Jean Stearns's *Jazz Dance*, the buck-and-wing was a combination of soft-shoe, clog dancing, and jig that was popular with minstrel performers.

¹⁵² Ibid., 105-106.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 12.

Other examples of early jazz bands that situated their music within the broader context of comedy, song, or dance include Tom Brown's Band from Dixieland, who performed with dancer Joe Frisco,¹⁵⁴ the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, who performed with vocalist and dancer Bee Palmer,¹⁵⁵ and the Original Memphis Five, who accompanied dancers Vi Quinn and Frank Farnum.¹⁵⁶

Another important early jazz band was Bert Kelly's Jazz Band, which began working in vaudeville soon after the Creole Band began touring the Pantages circuit. Bert Kelly was a white banjoist based in Chicago.¹⁵⁷ He later became a club owner; his club, Kelly's Stables, hosted seminal jazz clarinetist Johnny Dodds, among others.¹⁵⁸ Kelly and his six-piece jazz band started working in vaudeville theaters in Chicago around 1915. Vaudevillian Joe Laurie would later credit Kelly with starting the jazz band craze in vaudeville. Laurie noted that after Kelly's band's debut, "there were thousands that followed him" and "there were about two dozen acts in vaude using their own [jazz] bands for accompaniment instead of just having a piano player."¹⁵⁹ Laurie's anecdote seems to indicate that Kelly's band was directly responsible for the influx of jazz bands to vaudeville, but because of his failure to provide dates, it could be that the jazz craze in vaudeville to which he refers started a couple of years later, with the commercial success of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's first recordings.

¹⁵⁴ Richard M. Sudhalter, *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁹ Joe Laurie Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 71.

Kelly himself claimed both to have coined the phrase “jazz band” and to have inspired the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to refer to themselves as a jazz band:

This was in the fall of 1916, and [Kelly’s] band from White City was the first band ever to be advertised as a “jazz” band. It was a big success, and in the spring of 1917 James sent to New Orleans for the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and insisted upon their using the words “Jazz Band.” This was in 1917, and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was the first New Orleans band to use the term, while Bert Kelly used it in 1915. Bert Kelly had about twenty orchestras known as Bert Kelly’s Jazz Band, and when the Dixieland arrived they adopted their name of “Original Dixieland Jazz Band.”¹⁶⁰

The word “jazz” probably first appeared in San Francisco at around the turn of the century, where it meant either “energy” or “enthusiasm” or had a more explicit sexual connotation. Chicago advertisers were referring to bands as “jazz” bands as early as 1914, when clarinetist Bud Jacobson remembered seeing an advertisement for a jazz band at Chicago’s Arsonia Café.¹⁶¹ Kelly’s most important contribution, then, was not in being the first to lead a jazz band, it was in being among the first to refer to his music as jazz music in a high-profile vaudeville context, thus popularizing the new label. Most of his contemporaries’ jazz bands played in restaurants for dancers rather than in large theaters.

A brief review of a Bert Kelly performance at Chicago’s Wilson Theater from a 1917 issue of *Variety* gives an idea of the context in which Kelly’s Jazz Band performed:

Bert Kelly and his College Inn Jazz Band, with Lillian Watson, scored a happy hit. Kelly’s musicians played some snappy, lively numbers, while

¹⁶⁰ *Literary Digest*, “Stale Bread’s Sadness Gave ‘Jazz’ to the World,” in *Jazz in Print (1856-1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History*, edited by Karl Koenig (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2002), 132, originally published April 26, 1919.

¹⁶¹ Sudhalter, *Lost Chords*, 8-9.

Miss Watson did several songs enthusiastically applauded. Both Kelly and Miss Watson are big local favorites, and their combined strength made the turn seem unusually strong.¹⁶²

Kelly's Jazz Band shared the bill with a "Dutch" act, a pair of singing sisters, and a mind reader.¹⁶³

That so many of Kelly's competitors worked in restaurants in large Northern cities underlines the frequent association of early white jazz bands with restaurants, which in urban areas occasionally served as meeting places for entertainers. Many restaurants of the period doubled as cabarets. They had a band for dancing and sometimes featured spontaneous vaudeville-style entertainment as well, if there was a famous vaudevillian in the house. As actress and singer Sophie Tucker wrote in her autobiography,

We had no master of ceremonies in those days. At all the hot spots the proprietor kept things going. Usually whenever any professional entertainers came in he recognized them and would call on them to come out on the floor and entertain the crowd. It was free entertainment, impromptu, and it created a feeling of camaraderie.¹⁶⁴

In December 1916, Tucker became one of the first vaudeville stars to work regularly in a restaurant, where she fronted a jazz band:

The Boss sold [Reisenweber's restaurant in New York, where the Original Dixieland Jazz Band worked about a month later] the idea of giving the customers something different in entertainment—a vaudeville headliner, a woman who could sing and with her own band. It was a new idea, but it worked...We opened two days before Christmas, 1916. We entertained during the dinner hour and put on a late show. My band played for the

¹⁶² Variety. 1917. Editorial. April 13.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Sophie Tucker, *Some of These Days: The Autobiography of Sophie Tucker* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1945), 138.

dancing during dinner and again during the supper hour. Another band relieved them until the supper crowd came in.¹⁶⁵

After Tom Brown's Band from Dixieland experienced success playing for dancers at Lamb's Café in Chicago, several other New Orleans groups traveled to the city to play in cabarets. These included Stein's Band from Dixie, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings.¹⁶⁶ Some of these bands would combine cabaret work with stints in more traditional vaudeville settings. An example is Brown's Band from Dixieland, which occasionally played in vaudeville theaters while also working at Lamb's Café.¹⁶⁷

The release of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's first recordings on March 7, 1917 was a singularly important moment in jazz history, marking the "official" start of recorded jazz. The band consisted of white New Orleans natives who had moved to Chicago to work, including cornetist Nick LaRocca, clarinetist Larry Shields, trombonist Eddie Edwards, pianist Henry Ragas, and drummer Tony Sbarbaro.¹⁶⁸ They were playing for dancers at Reisenweber's restaurant in New York when Columbia Records approached them with an offer to record. The ODJB played for a recording session at the Columbia studio on January 30, but Columbia executives deemed the resulting recordings (the early jazz standards "Indiana" and "Darktown Strutters' Ball") offensive and decided against releasing them.¹⁶⁹ On February 26, they recorded "Livery Stable Blues" and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 156.

¹⁶⁶ Sudhalter, *Lost Chords*, 3-28.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁹ Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 56-60.

“Dixieland Jass Band One-Step” for Victor. These recordings were released on March 7, 1917 and went on to sell over a million copies,¹⁷⁰ marking the start of America’s jazz craze.

The number of jazz bands in New York City exploded almost overnight, prompting a journalist to write in a humorous editorial for the *New York Sun* that

The Jazzbo reign of schrecklichkeit in the Broadway restaurants extends from the Circle to the Square and up most of the side streets. Sagacious restaurateurs during the Jazzbo numbers are now serving ear muffs on request to fractious patrons who insist on retaining their hearing. The difficulties of dinner conversation increased so rapidly after the Jazz bands came in that ever tête-à-tête table communication had to be abandoned for a form of sign language.¹⁷¹

In 1920, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band returned from a tour of England to find a new crowd of imitators on the New York vaudeville and cabaret scene, including the Louisiana Five, the St. Louis Five, the Domino Five, the Frisco Jass Band, and the Original New Orleans Jazz Band.¹⁷² Sudhalter points out in his history of early white jazz musicians that the proliferation of “Fives” was a direct response to the popularity of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Countless new bands, both black and white, sought to imitate the ODJB’s instrumentation and command of novelty effects.¹⁷³

The pronounced effects of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band’s popularity and the resulting jazz craze would remain evident in vaudeville for the next several years, both in the presence of small novelty jazz groups and in the

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷¹ Editorial in *New York Sun*, reprinted in *Kansas City Star*, April 13, 1917.

¹⁷² Ward, *Jazz*, 76.

¹⁷³ Sudhalter, *Lost Chords*, 24.

playing style of the pit orchestras. According to *Metronome* magazine, there were over seventy-five jazz orchestras playing in vaudeville by 1923.¹⁷⁴ Beginning immediately after the release of the 1917 Dixieland Jazz Band recordings and continuing into the 1920s, those pit and dance orchestras not strictly devoted to jazz often hired a “hot” jazz soloist—usually a trumpeter—to inject excitement into otherwise tame arrangements. Examples of this practice include trumpeter Louis Panico’s work with the Isham Jones Orchestra, trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, and trumpeter Louis Armstrong with the early Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Cornetist Ray Lopez remembers playing this role in the pit orchestra at Keith’s Majestic Theatre in New York in 1917:

...I stood up on a chair in the pit and waved a derby hat over the bell of my cornet, producing a weird effect (so I’ve been told)...I had transformed that staid pit band into a really hot jazz band...¹⁷⁵

The next important stylistic development in jazz—and jazz as vaudeville entertainment—would come not from the energetic small groups of the teens and early twenties, but from the pit and dance orchestras that had adopted syncopated music and jazz elements in response to the jazz craze sparked by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. This process of adoption is evident as early as 1910 in the work of black bandleader James Reese Europe, whose 105-piece Clef Club Orchestra performed spirituals and traditional African-American music

¹⁷⁴ David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 37.

¹⁷⁵ Sudhalter, *Lost Chords*, 24.

as well as new, syncopated styles like ragtime and show tunes. In 1914, Europe took a 10-piece ensemble on the road, performing syncopated dance music to accompany the famous dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle.¹⁷⁶ Various small ensembles, which Europe drew from the membership of his black musicians' union in New York City, the Clef Club, proved extremely popular at dances around New York.¹⁷⁷ Europe, who was a trained violinist and pianist and later served as an officer and band leader in World War I,¹⁷⁸ was making a conscious effort to make the general American public aware of the beauty of black music. Europe would later state that it was black composers' duty to write music reflective of their own culture rather than attempting to conform to Eurocentric compositional ideals:

I have come back from France [after World War I] more firmly convinced than ever that Negroes should write Negro music. We have our own racial feeling and if we try to copy whites we will make bad copies...if we are to develop in America we must develop along our own lines. Our musicians do their best work when using Negro material. Will Marion Cook, William Tires, even Harry Burleigh and [Samuel] Coleridge-Taylor are not truly themselves in the music which expresses [*sic*] their race.¹⁷⁹

After his service in World War I, Europe began to incorporate jazz into his music for the Clef Club Orchestra. Europe died in 1919, when his experiments were still in their very early stages.¹⁸⁰ His music as preserved on records—his

¹⁷⁶ Ward, *Jazz*, 57-59.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Literary Digest*, "A Negro Explains 'Jazz'," in *Jazz in Print (1856-1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History*, edited by Karl Koenig (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2002), 132, originally published April 26, 1919.

¹⁸⁰ Ward, *Jazz*, 70.

orchestra was the first black one to record¹⁸¹—was still in the older orchestral ragtime style at the time of his death, but his work with vernacular African-American styles paved the way for later dance bands, which successfully incorporated varying degrees of jazz into their arrangements.

Probably the best known and commercially successful of these early jazz-influenced dance orchestras was that of Paul Whiteman. Whiteman was the son of a respected Colorado music educator. As a young man, he played viola in the San Francisco Symphony.¹⁸² While in San Francisco, Whiteman heard jazz performed in a club in the city's Barbary Coast neighborhood.¹⁸³ He quickly resolved to “make a lady of jazz” by combining jazz with classical and dance band influences, while also attempting to remove the social stigma that jazz carried at that time. In fact, Whiteman's most important contribution to jazz history was in his blending of the classical and jazz traditions, which led him to commission “Rhapsody and Blue” from George Gershwin.¹⁸⁴ Whiteman's synthesis of classical music and jazz would influence the Third Stream movement of the 1940s and 50s, which sought to combine jazz with modern classical music. Billed as the “King of Jazz” during the 1920s, Whiteman would later draw criticism from historians for his bands' “watered-down” and classical music-influenced style. Whiteman's band remains one of the most important in jazz history, however, because of the advanced arrangements of Bill Challis and

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁸² Ibid., 99

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

the contributions of some of the era's most important white jazz musicians, including Bix Beiderbecke, Frank Trumbauer, and Bing Crosby.¹⁸⁵

Another, even more influential band was that of black bandleader Fletcher Henderson, who initially modeled his orchestra on that of Paul Whiteman. Using the innovative arrangements of alto saxophonist Don Redman, Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra established the standard swing band instrumentation (saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and rhythm sections) and the standard big band arranging practice of pitting the band's sections against each other. Redman achieved this effect by writing complicated ensemble passages for each section to play as a group and interlocking the ensemble choruses of the different sections. Redman's arranging style, combined with the work of soloists including at various times Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Roy Eldridge, Buster Bailey, and Sidney Catlett, made Henderson's orchestra among the most influential in jazz history.

The new jazz influenced dance orchestras often accompanied acts in shows called revues, particularly in New York City. The difference between vaudeville and its parallel genre, the revue, had always been vague, but by the mid-twenties, the distinction between traditional vaudeville and revue had become especially muddled. American revues developed out of vaudeville and burlesque entertainment in New York City in the late 19th century.¹⁸⁶ The first important revue was Florenz Ziegfeld's *Follies of 1907*, the first show in the long

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁸⁶ Andrew Lamb, et al. "Revue." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23288> (accessed September 28, 2012).

run of the famous *Ziegfeld Follies*.¹⁸⁷ The show was spectacular, with impressive sets and costumes, appearances by famous entertainers, a large cast, and a chorus of beautiful women.¹⁸⁸ Like earlier revues, it was a satire on the previous season of New York theatrical productions and featured a mixture of humorous songs, dances, satirical sketches, and specialty acts, making it very similar in style and content to a traditional vaudeville show.¹⁸⁹

Although it is difficult to draw a definite line between vaudeville and revue, there were some important differences between the two genres. Revues featured more unified thematic content, usually focused on a particular theatrical season or other theme. They performed mainly on Broadway in New York City, and had much larger budgets than most vaudeville shows. The difference between vaudeville and revue becomes even more difficult to discern by the mid-twenties, because advertisers and journalists were sometimes using the words “vaudeville” and “revue” interchangeably, as in these examples from the *New York Sun*:

Ned Wayburn’s famous vaudeville revues, “The Honeymoon Cruise” and “The Demi-Tasse Revue,” will open the first week in September for a full season’s bookings. They are the most popular musical acts in vaudeville, playing extended and repeat engagements everywhere.¹⁹⁰

New Brighton—Gus Edwards with his annual song revue heads the new bill of oceanside vaudeville.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ *New York Sun*, “The Weyburn Revues,” August 20, 1925.

¹⁹¹ *New York Sun*, “Brooklyn Theaters,” June 20, 1925.

Another confusing example, from a 1928 advertisement in a Kansas newspaper, mentions a “Midnight Vaudeville Revue.”¹⁹² Traditional vaudeville and revues had become nearly indistinguishable; as early as 1923, the New York Times noted that

The sole difference, in fact, between vaudeville and the revue is the reappearance of individual performers in several scenes in the revue, the general lavish tone in which the revue proceedings are conducted, and the absence of vaudeville’s dumb acts.¹⁹³

Historical accounts, then, indicate that by the 1920s, the revue was essentially a better-funded incarnation of vaudeville. Jazz bands played an important role in many revues of the period, and for the purposes of this study, I will categorize revues under the larger heading of vaudeville-style entertainment, as I have done in Chapter 2 with circus sideshows.

In the mid-twenties, following the success of several novels and theatrical productions that sensationalized life in Harlem, the neighborhood experienced a sudden influx of tourism. This in turn led to the growth of a number of clubs, including the Cotton Club, Connie’s Inn, and Small’s Paradise. The larger cabarets staged elaborate revues, with comedians, singers, dancers, and chorus lines accompanied by jazz orchestras.¹⁹⁴ The entertainment at the large Harlem nightclubs featured the best black jazz bands in the country and centered on exoticised and stereotypical depictions of African-American life and culture.

¹⁹² Advertisement in *Topeka Plaindealer*, September 21, 1928.

¹⁹³ *New York Times*, “The Modern Revue And How It Is Put Together,” September 16, 1923.

¹⁹⁴ Samuel B. Charters and Leonard Kunstadt, *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 193-196.

Many dance bands during this period worked nightly accompanying revues and floorshows in the extravagant Harlem nightclubs or worked in theaters to supplement jobs playing for dancers in ballrooms. The most famous jazz band to work steadily in nightclub revues was the Duke Ellington Orchestra, which first rose to prominence as the house band at Harlem's Cotton Club. Ellington's orchestra, which had earlier accompanied the floorshow at the Club Kentucky, began working at the Cotton Club in the summer of 1927.¹⁹⁵ The Cotton Club, which was New York's most famous nightclub in the 1920s and 30s, first opened in 1920 as the Club Deluxe, owned by former heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. After purchasing the club in 1922, Owney Madden changed its name to the Cotton Club. The club became famous for its elaborate revues, its beautiful light-skinned chorus girls, and its whites-only policy. It remained more or less consistently in business until its final closure in 1940.¹⁹⁶ While working at the Cotton Club, Ellington's orchestra accompanied the fifteen-act Cotton Club Revue. They also performed a flashy overture at the beginning of each show and played two or three pieces in between the other acts.¹⁹⁷ By the end of 1927, thanks to both the Cotton Club shows and recordings and radio broadcasts, audiences and the press regarded Ellington's orchestra as second only to the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁹⁶ "Nightclubs and other venues." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., edited by Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J330000pg38> (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹⁹⁷ Charles and Kunstadt, *Jazz*, 218-219.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

During his residency at the club, Ellington also found vaudeville work elsewhere. In addition to their nightly work at the Cotton Club, the *New York Age* reported that the entire Cotton Club Revue would occasionally leave the club to perform at different venues around New York City:

Oftimes the orchestra and the revue are taken for an hour or so to different functions to 'strut their stuff.' On these occasions, when necessary, an outside orchestra is hired to play and hold the crowd until Duke gets back on the job. Usually Duke gives the subbing to Willie Lynch, a drummer...Lynch would hire the men and be leader on the job.¹⁹⁹

For example, Ellington appeared at the Central Republican Club's Annual Ball on February 23, 1929, with the entire Cotton Club Revue and "several well known vaudeville actors."²⁰⁰ At around the same time, the *New York Age* published a description of a revue at Harlem's Lincoln Theatre in which Ellington and his orchestra appeared:

With the Cotton Club Band on the stage and Ralph Cooper as the genial master of ceremonies, the new management of the Lincoln Theatre presented to its patrons the second edition of the Junior Blackbirds of Harlem.

No play has been so well received at the Lincoln Theatre within the reviewer's memory. Gorgeously costumed and with dazzling scenery, this revue represents the finest of the 'presentation' type of entertainment which is finding such favor in the motion picture palaces of the country. There is a wealth of comedy in the show, while the dancing and music are infinitely better than any presented to Lincoln Theatre audiences in two years.

The work of the Cotton Club Band was particularly appreciated, its version of a Southern camp meeting bringing down storms of applause.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Percival Outram, "Activities Among Union Musicians," *New York Age*, January 26, 1929.

²⁰⁰ *New York Age*, "Central Republican Club's Annual Ball Attracts Large Crowd," March 2, 1929.

²⁰¹ *New York Age*, "Many Improvements Being Made At Lincoln." March 30, 1929.

Nearly every other medium-to-large sized cabaret in New York City during the twenties and thirties featured some sort of vaudeville entertainment accompanied by a black jazz orchestra. Other than Ellington and his orchestra, two of the most famous jazz figures to work in revues were Cab Calloway, whose orchestra replaced Ellington's at the Cotton Club when Ellington left in 1931,²⁰² and Fletcher Henderson, whose orchestra worked in revues in addition to its regular job playing New York ballrooms. The *New York Age* published a glowing review of a Henderson Orchestra performance as part of a 1928 revue at the Lafayette Theatre:

There comes a time in every reviewer's life when the English language fails him in his efforts to do justice to a particularly inspiring show. This is the case now when attempting to describe Leonard Harper's new revue hit 'Jazz Phantasy' which opened a week's engagement at the Lafayette Theatre Monday. And the trouble arises from the fact that the greatest of all bands—Fletcher Henderson's Roseland Orchestra—weaves such an entrancing spell about the revue that one feels as if he were treading on air and cannot adequately describe his feelings...²⁰³

White jazz orchestras also found work in theatrical revues and vaudeville during the twenties and thirties, although black groups dominated the famous Harlem nightclubs. Orchestras such as Paul Whiteman's and Jean Goldkette's had worked in vaudeville and revues throughout the 1920s. Increasing numbers of white jazz ensembles began to work in Broadway musicals and revues after the onset of the Great Depression, when work became scarcer. In the early 1930s, for example, a smaller version of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra was playing for shows at the Roxy Theatre. The pit orchestras for the Gershwin

²⁰² Charles and Kunstadt, *Jazz*, 247.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 204.

musicals *Strike Up the Band* and *Girl Crazy* featured such famous jazzmen as Benny Goodman, Red Nichols, Glenn Miller, and Gene Krupa.²⁰⁴

Jazz ensembles as they appeared in theatrical settings of this period differed from the traditional jazz orchestra format as established by bands like the early Fletcher Henderson Orchestra but were still identifiably rooted in traditional jazz band instrumentation. A jazz orchestra would often add a string section, and sometimes auxiliary brass, for vaudeville work. For example, a major catalyst in the breakup of the classic late twenties edition of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra came when Henderson added an all-white string section and a white conductor to play a revue in a Philadelphia theater.²⁰⁵ Other jazz orchestras to add string sections for theatrical engagements included Sam Wooding's Orchestra, which toured Europe with the *Chocolate Kiddies* revue,²⁰⁶ and Leroy Tibbs' Orchestra, which accompanied the floorshow at Connie's Inn in Harlem.²⁰⁷

The end of jazz's long relationship with vaudeville entertainment came because of vaudeville's decline, in the form of widespread theater closings, and because of jazz's transformation in the 1940s from a popular music to a concert music, which led to the dissipation of significant jazz activity even in the surviving Broadway revues. White vaudeville went into decline in 1929 and eventually disappeared because of the stock market crash, which severely curtailed

²⁰⁴ Sudhalter, *Lost Chords*, 343.

²⁰⁵ Charles and Kunstadt, *Jazz*, 182

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 204

revenues for all forms of white entertainment,²⁰⁸ and the steadily increasing influence of the new film and radio industries. Black vaudeville shows did not feel the effects of the economic crisis until the early 1930s. This was because black shows tended to have lower budgets than the more spectacular white revues. Black productions concentrated on music and dance, meaning that they didn't require as many costumes or props and were much less costly to produce.²⁰⁹ Traveling revues continued to play in an ever-dwindling number of vaudeville theaters until the late 1930s, when most white and black theaters were showing films exclusively.

Additionally, the wide popularity of swing bands by the late 1930s undermined jazz bands' traditional role in vaudeville as accompaniment or one of many acts making up a complete show. White bandleader Benny Goodman's famous success at Los Angeles's Palomar Ballroom in 1935 marked the beginning of the Swing Era. Big band dance music would remain the most popular music in America through the rest of the 1930s and into the 40s.²¹⁰ Swing's wide popularity as dance music—and music for listening, as in Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert²¹¹—led to a decisive shift away from theater work and towards ballrooms and concert halls. Large jazz ensembles were now popular enough to work exclusively as standalone entertainment, unlike the bands of the late 1920s and early 1930s, which often worked both in

²⁰⁸ Nadine George-Graves, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville: The Whitman Sisters and the Negotiation of Race, Gender, and Class in African American Theater, 1900-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 108-109.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹⁰ Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 145.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

ballrooms and in vaudeville. The modern jazz movement of the 1940s served to reorient jazz as concert music, marking the genre's final move away from show business as exemplified by vaudeville and revues.

Chapter 4: Vaudeville in Jazz

One of the most obvious vestiges of vaudeville that frequently appears in jazz recordings and descriptions of jazz performances is humorous dialogue or skits, either bookending the music or interspersed throughout the performance. These skits are a holdover from jazz's early days in vaudeville, when musicians—particularly black musicians—needed to couch their new, unfamiliar, and potentially subversive music within a more conventional entertainment framework, such as minstrelsy. The most prominent early example of this practice comes from the Creole Band, which performed its music in front of a plantation backdrop and incorporated a minstrel-style skit featuring blackface entertainer Henry Morgan Prince into its vaudeville act. As Lawrence Gushee notes,

Much of what [black entertainers] were allowed or expected to do drew on venerable minstrel routines...So the Creole Band's reliance on the Uncle Joe routine and the singing of 'My Old Kentucky Home' was almost to be

expected, as also their wearing of southern farmhand costumes and their blackface makeup.²¹²

At the same time—also in 1914—jazz pianist and composer Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton was working in vaudeville, pairing his music with piano stunts and blackface clowning. The *Indianapolis Freeman* wrote that Morton

...plays a good piano, classics and rags with equal ease. His one hand stunt, left hand alone, playing a classic selection, is a good one. [Morton and his partner, Rose Morton] do an amusing comedy bit, singing ‘That Ain’t Got ‘Em.’ This is sung by both of them in a duo style. They make a hit in this, which is Morton’s own composition. In fact he composes most of his own songs and arranges his other work. As a comedian, Morton is grotesque in his makeup.²¹³

By the early 1920s, even those jazz bands working outside of vaudeville theaters, in dance halls and cabarets, were incorporating elements of vaudevillian theatricality and humor into their performances. Louis Armstrong remembered a Joe “King” Oliver performance in which

...they went into a number called ‘Eccentric’—that is the one where Papa Joe took a lot of breaks. He would take a four bar break, then the Band would play, then he would take four more. At the very last chorus he and Bill Johnson would do a sort of Act musically. While Joe Oliver would be talking like a baby [with his cornet], Bill Johnson would pet the baby in his high voice [with his bass]. The first baby Joe would imitate was supposed to be a white baby. When Joe’s horn had cried like the white baby, Bill Johnson would come back with, ‘Don’t Cry Little Baby.’ The last baby was supposed to be a little colored baby, then they would break it up. Joe would yell, ‘Baaaah! baaaaaaah!’ Then Bill would shout, ‘Shut up you lil so and sooooooo.’ Then the whole house would thunder with laughs and applause.²¹⁴

²¹² Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.

²¹³ “MORTON & MORTON: Comedy, Music, Dancing,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, June 13, 1914.

²¹⁴ Louis Armstrong, “The Armstrong Story,” in *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words: Selected Writings*, edited by Thomas Brothers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Originally written in 1954.

In fact, Armstrong's anecdote describes a combination of vaudeville-style humor, represented by the comic dialogue between Oliver and Johnson, and "novelty" effects, which will be discussed in detail below.

Humorous spoken dialogue and short vaudeville-style skits appear frequently in the recorded work of Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton, arguably the two most important jazz recording artists of the 1920s. Morton, who spent his early career touring with small vaudeville stock companies,²¹⁵ as in the aforementioned *Indianapolis Freeman* review, makes heavy use of comedic dialogue and extramusical sound effects on his classic 1926-1927 small group recordings with his band, the Red Hot Peppers. Clearly displaying the influence of vaudeville theater on his work, Morton makes masterful use of sonic detail to create scenes. In his 1926 "Steamboat Stomp," for example, Morton opens with a snippet of comic dialogue but also includes such details as the whistle of the titular steamboat, which opens the recording, crowd noise, and even the faint sound of a banjo strumming on the shore.²¹⁶ Another recording from 1926, "Dead Man Blues," provides a miniature reproduction of a traditional New Orleans funeral, including the tolling of church bells and a band playing "Flee as a Bird to the Mountain." True to his roots in vaudeville and minstrelsy, Morton includes the following exchange between himself and banjoist Johnny St. Cyr, which the two men deliver in stereotypical black dialect:

²¹⁵ Howard Reich and William Gaines, *Jelly's Blues: The Life, Music, and Redemption of Jelly Roll Morton* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 29.

²¹⁶ Boyd Senter, *Steamboat Stomp*, Jelly-Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Victor 20296-B, September 21, 1926.

Morton: What's that I hear twelve o' clock in the daytime? Church bells ringin'.

St. Cyr: Man, you don't hear no church bells ringin' twelve o' clock in the day.

Morton: Yes indeed, somebody must be dead!

St. Cyr: Ain't nobody dead. Somebody must be dead drunk.

Morton: No, I think it's a fun'ral. Now lookahere, I believe they is a funeral. I believe I hear that trambone-phone.²¹⁷

Morton's 1926 "Sidewalk Blues" again features comic dialogue and makes heavy use of extramusical effects like car horns, whistling, and shouting to conjure the image of a busy street.²¹⁸ Two Red Hot Peppers recordings from 1927, "Billy Goat Stomp" and "Hyena Stomp," feature the goat impression²¹⁹ and the incessant laughing,²²⁰ respectively, of vaudeville comedian Lew Lamar.

Armstrong's roughly contemporaneous Hot Five and Seven recordings, cut between 1925 and 1929, display a similar use of skits and comic dialogue, but their staging is less vivid than that of the Morton recordings and they make greater use of ethnic parody, another vaudeville staple. For instance, "The King of the Zulus" includes an altercation between Armstrong and a man with a heavy Jamaican accent (performed by Clarence Babcock), who "interrupts" the recording session to demand a plate of chitlins. The band continues playing only after pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong offers the interloper a meal.²²¹ Another Hot Fives recording, "He Likes it Slow," features humorous singing from the husband

²¹⁷ Jelly Roll Morton, *Dead Man Blues*, Jelly-Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Victor 20252-B, September 21, 1926.

²¹⁸ Jelly Roll Morton, *Sidewalk Blues*, Jelly-Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Victor 20252-A, September 21, 1926.

²¹⁹ Jelly Roll Morton, *Billy Goat Stomp*, Jelly-Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Victor 20772-B, June 4, 1927.

²²⁰ Jelly Roll Morton, *Hyena Stomp*, Jelly-Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, Victor 20772-A, June 4, 1927.

²²¹ Lil Hardin, *King of the Zulus*, Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, OKeh 8396, June 23, 1926.

and wife team of Butterbeans and Susie, who were then famous on the black vaudeville circuits.²²² Armstrong's later 1920s recordings occasionally featured brief skits, usually performed by himself and pianist Earl Hines. "A Monday Date," for example, begins with about thirty seconds of patter between Armstrong and Hines:

[Hines piano solo]

Armstrong: Hey, say, say, say Earl Hines, why don't you let us in on some of that good music, Pops?

Hines: Well c'mon in, let's get together, then.

Armstrong: All right, tune up, boys.

[Band tuning]

Armstrong: How's that? All right? Is that all right?

Hines: [ambivalently] Aw, that sounds pretty good...

Armstrong: [mockingly] Yes, that sounds pretty good. I bet if you had a half a pint of Miss Circe's gin you wouldn't say 'that sounds pretty good.' Well anyhow, we gonna play anyway. Hey c'mon Zutty [Singleton, the band's drummer] whip them cymbals, Pops.²²³

On "Tight Like This," another recording by the same group, the dialogue between Hines and Armstrong is sexually suggestive, with Hines playing the female role and speaking in falsetto:

[Ensemble plays a few bars as an opening, followed by piano vamping]

Hines: Oh, it's tight like this!

Armstrong: No, it ain't tight like that, either.

Hines: I say it IS tight like this!

Armstrong: Let it be tight like that, then!²²⁴

Humor and humorous dialogue continued to serve as a useful device for jazz musicians long after the 1920s and the decline of vaudeville. An especially

²²² Overstreet, *He Likes it Slow*, Butterbeans and Susie, OKeh 8355, June 18, 1926.

²²³ Earl Hines, *A Monday Date*, Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, OKeh 8609, June 27, 1928.

²²⁴ Curl, *Tight Like This*, Louis Armstrong and His Savoy Ballroom Five, OKeh 8649, December 12, 1928.

prominent example of the lingering influence of vaudeville on jazz performance was bebop trumpeter John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie, who presented his challenging modern jazz with liberal amounts of humor. Jazz musician and researcher Bill Crow recounts a skit that Gillespie and saxophonist James Moody often performed during concerts:

After the opening chorus of a tune with both horns playing in unison, Moody and Dizzy would step to the microphone at the same time. They would bump into each other, stop, look at each other, and pantomime a dispute, while the rhythm section continued to play...At this point Moody reaches quickly into his pocket and keeps his hand there, with an obvious sharp point showing through the material of his pants. Dizzy’s eyes pop open in alarm, and he reaches into his own pocket. They crouch warily and circle each other as the tension mounts. Then, simultaneously, they whip their hands from their pockets and spring dangerously at each other—and dance an elegant fox-trot together as the rhythm section plays on.²²⁵

In another of Gillespie’s well-known onstage antics, he would announce, “And now, I’d like to introduce the members of the band,” before proceeding to literally introduce the members of the band to each other.²²⁶

Interestingly, humor served the same purpose for the jazz modernists of the bebop era that it had for the early jazz musicians in vaudeville. Jokes and skits were useful in coaxing audiences to accept bebop, a new and intellectually challenging form of jazz improvisation. Similarly, bands like the Creole Jazz Band and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had employed vaudeville humor to engage their audiences, and in this way were able to get their new and radical improvised music before attentive crowds. A late example of the humorous

²²⁵ Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 310.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

sketch appears on trumpeter and bandleader Thad Jones's 1979 album *Eclipse*, which features Jones fronting his big band of the same name. The album's arrangement of "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" features trombonist Richard Boone singing a comically stiff version of the lyrics before Jones stops him in disgust. Jones then leads the entire band in singing "hip" lyrics to the standard, which jokingly invoke the stereotype of the destitute jazz musician ("I can't give you anything but love/ 'Cause I'm beat to my socks, everything is in hock"). Following this, Boone, having finally gotten the right idea, responds with a chorus of scat singing.²²⁷

Vaudeville also exerted a crucial influence on jazz performance in the area of tone production. The tradition of altering instrumental timbres in jazz performance has its roots in West African music, which enslaved Africans brought to the Americas beginning in the 17th century. One of the key stylistic features of West African music is the use of instruments to emulate the human voice, particularly in the case of the *kalangu*, or talking drum.²²⁸ This instrumental practice is one of the foundational aesthetic principles of African-American music, serving as the basis for the flexible intonation and timbral variation evident in such genres as the blues and gospel music. The manipulation of instrumental timbre among vaudeville musicians was unusual in that it had its roots in southern African-American folk culture, which then entered vaudeville through the work of early jazz musicians. Vaudeville companies then popularized the use of these devices—called "novelty" or "freak" effects—bringing them to white and

²²⁷ Harvey Siders, "Thad Jones: Eclipse," *JazzTimes*, January/February 2005, <http://jazztimes.com/articles/15491-eclipse-thad-jones> (accessed October 23, 2012)

²²⁸ Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 9.

Northern black audiences and musicians, most of whom were unfamiliar with the conventions of southern black folk music. These musicians then reapplied the tools of tonal manipulation to jazz improvisation in non-theatrical contexts. Early jazz musicians in vaudeville used their instruments to simulate a variety of nonmusical sounds, including growls, grunts, squeals, sobbing, and laughter. For example, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band incorporated simulated animal sounds into their performances, most famously on their influential recording of “Livery Stable Blues.” Like the vaudeville musicians who would follow their example, the musicians of the ODJB used novelty sounds purely for comedic effect. Geoffrey Ward notes that

The emphasis [in the ODJB’s recordings] was on comedy: Nick LaRocca made his cornet whinny like a horse; Larry Shields crowed like a rooster with his clarinet; Daddy [Eddie] Edwards made his trombone moo.²²⁹

This manipulation of tone color to emulate the human voice or nonmusical sound informed the work of Louis Armstrong, whose trumpet sound mirrored the gravelly tone of his voice. It resurfaced in the free jazz of the 1960s and 70s, although its use changed significantly with the new musical context. The main difference between the effects in the vaudeville work of groups like the ODJB and the free jazz of Ornette Coleman or the Art Ensemble of Chicago was that the later jazz musicians expanded the emotional palette of “novelty” effects in an effort to express a complex range of emotions like anger, sadness, and longing in addition to comedy.

²²⁹ Ward and Burns, *Jazz*, 64.

Similarly, jazz brass players' use of a variety of unorthodox mutes stems from the African-American folk tradition of tonal manipulation. Cornet, trumpet, and trombone players in vaudeville frequently made use of mutes to create new sounds, particularly while accompanying blues singers. Garvin Bushell recalled that the first trumpet player to use a plunger mute was Johnny Dunn, who was then performing in vaudeville with blues singer Mamie Smith.²³⁰ However, in an interesting exception to the trend mentioned above, it would appear that the use of mutes—unlike the more general sound effects mentioned above—owes most of its continuing importance among brass players to other forms of entertainment. By far the most influential musician to frequently employ mutes, Joe “King” Oliver, rose to fame performing for dancers in Chicago nightclubs and later through recordings by his Creole Jazz Band, although he did perform briefly in vaudeville with pianist, composer, and publisher Clarence Williams. The *Indianapolis Freeman* mentioned that Oliver was part of a band studded with other early jazz pioneers, and that they performed Williams's newest compositions:

Mr. [Clarence] Williams and his partner, Prof. Armand J. Piron, are going on a big tour for a month, demonstrating their new songs...on their tour they are taking with them a seven-piece ragtime Creole band: Prof. Armand J. Piron, violinist; Mr. Henry Zeno, trap drummer; Mr. Zu Robinson, trombonist; Mr. Bachai [*sic*, possibly Sidney Bechet], clarinetist; Mr. Joe Olliver [*sic*], cornetist; Kid Eddie, bass violinist; Mr. Clarence Williams, pianist.²³¹

²³⁰ Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes*, 31.

²³¹ Clarence Williams, “Manhattan Cabaret Closed for a Month,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 19, 1916, 6.

It was, however, through the mediums of recordings and nightclub performances for dancers that Oliver's vocalized style would influence the Ellington trumpet section, the work of modern jazz musicians like Miles Davis, and contemporary players like Wynton Marsalis.

Perhaps the single most important and pervasive influence that vaudeville entertainment has had on jazz is in the area of repertoire. A large percentage of the songs that competent jazz musicians are expected to know and perform originally appeared on vaudeville stages, where they became popular and were then adopted by jazz musicians as fodder for improvisation. Until roughly 1930, Tin Pan Alley music publishers' primary means of publicizing new songs was to persuade famous vaudevillians to work them into their acts. After hearing the music, audiences would rush out to buy the sheet music—or so the publishers hoped. At the beginning of a new season, vaudeville performers would visit publishing houses to find new songs to add to their acts. For a steep fee, publishing houses could also create completely new material, although the high prices—\$25.00 per week against future royalties—meant that only star performers could afford to take advantage of this service.²³² Other employees of the major publishing houses visited theaters, attempting to convince vaudeville stars to perform the newest pop songs. These men, known as “pluggers,” would often sing along from the audience when a new song appeared for the first

²³² David A. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and their Times* (New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc, 1988), xx.

time.²³³ This was another attempt at making new songs “stick” with prospective audiences, increasing sheet music sales.

Early jazz musicians, many of whom were actually working in show business and all of whom paid careful attention to popular taste, quickly adopted the new popular songs coming out of Tin Pan Alley by way of vaudeville. As David Jasen points out, contemporary audiences did not perceive early jazz as a distinct musical genre, but more as a “new style of playing popular songs.”²³⁴ Accordingly, the repertoires of the early jazz bands heavily featured Tin Pan Alley pop songs which audiences would have recognized from vaudeville shows, such as “Indiana,” “Darktown Strutters’ Ball,” and “Ja-Da.” Many of these Tin Pan Alley compositions became so ingrained within the jazz community that jazz musicians still perform them today. These songs, known as “standards,” make up the core of the jazz musician’s repertoire. The long list of jazz standards that premiered in vaudeville includes “Remember,” “After You’ve Gone,”²³⁵ “Get Happy,”²³⁶ “Everybody Loves My Baby,”²³⁷ “I Found a New Baby,”²³⁸ “Honeysuckle Rose,”²³⁹ “Ain’t Misbehavin’,”²⁴⁰ “Body and Soul,”²⁴¹ and “Stormy Weather.”²⁴²

²³³ Ibid., xvii.

²³⁴ Ibid., 74.

²³⁵ Ibid., 67-111.

²³⁶ David A. Jasen and Gene Jones, *Spreadin’ Rhythm Around: Black Songwriters, 1880-1930* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 94.

²³⁷ Ibid., 173.

²³⁸ Ibid., 178.

²³⁹ Ibid., 205.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 210.

²⁴¹ Will Friedwald, *Stardust Melodies: The Biography of Twelve of America’s Most Popular Songs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 154.

²⁴² Ibid., 280.

Conclusion

In the early 1950s, former vaudevillian Joe Laurie wrote that “...the real, honest, vital vaudeville of the old two-a-day of the Palace (and other big-time vaude) will never return.”²⁴³ Laurie was right. By the 1940s, a combination of economic pressures, —the Great Depression dealt the major vaudeville circuits a devastating blow—new technology, and changing tastes in entertainment had ended America’s vaudeville era. The powerful influence that vaudeville exerted on American popular culture during its heyday, however, had permanently altered the landscape of American arts and entertainment. Vaudevillian’s early and enthusiastic adoption of jazz is a case in point, as it proved one of the most consequential—if under-recognized—trends in jazz history.

Just before the turn of the 20th century, jazz existed mainly within southern black communities. It almost certainly would not have enjoyed its meteoric rise from an insular, regional folk music to an international entertainment phenomenon without vaudeville’s aid in reaching the American masses. In the space of about twenty years, early jazz had spread from its origins in the American South to the rest of the United States and as far away as Europe. Such a young and disreputable music with obscure folk origins likely never would have achieved mass popularity had it not caught the ears of enterprising promoters and inventive entertainers, who granted jazz musicians access to what

²⁴³ Joe Laurie Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 4.

was at the time the most efficient avenue for rapid cultural dissemination. The vast network of vaudeville circuits, from the big-time Keith and Orpheum chains to the smallest traveling tent shows, touched nearly every community in early 20th century America. Because jazz quickly permeated several different aspects of vaudeville entertainment, ranging from pit orchestras to comedy acts, audiences around the country learned about the new music in an unprecedentedly short time.

In conducting research and writing this paper, I hoped to shed new light on the discussion surrounding the development and popularization of early jazz and to challenge the relatively simplistic popular view regarding jazz's exclusive development in New Orleans, thus building on the more recent work of scholars such as Mark Berresford, Lynn Abbott, Doug Seroff, and Lawrence Gushee. The information that I have found, in the form of contemporary news reports, reviews, oral accounts, and, in some cases, recordings, does just that. Describing the important role that vaudeville musicians—and American vaudeville generally—played in jazz history doesn't displace New Orleans as the birthplace of jazz so much as it locates musicians' activities in that city in the broader context of musical developments that were happening simultaneously in other communities around the United States. For instance, while Charles "Buddy" Bolden, often called the "first jazz musician," was performing his new music for parades and parties in New Orleans, clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman was playing an early form of jazz in midwestern vaudeville theaters and museums. Or, in another example, small-time black tented vaudeville shows were featuring the music of jazz bands

and improvising jazz soloists for at least some years before the Original Dixieland Jazz Band arrived in New York City to make their first recordings.

All of these considerations add a few layers of complexity to the sketchy ideas still circulating in the popular imagination regarding the first decade or so of jazz history, many of which are based on oral histories collected long after the fact or on vague inferences from recordings. Additionally, a careful examination of the music of jazz ensembles in vaudeville will bring much-needed attention to the innovative work of musicians who often fail to appear in mainstream jazz histories. It is the musicologist's job to challenge widely held assumptions in order to deepen our collective knowledge of music and music history. This project hopefully will have gone some way toward achieving this goal for the scholarly discourse surrounding early jazz.

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