

CHAPTER THREE: “CATCHING AS THE SMALLPOX”: SOCIAL DANCE AND JAZZ, 1917–1935

Chapter Outline

I. Social Dance and Jazz, 1917–1935

A. The 1920s and early 1930s were a pivotal period in the development of American popular culture and the history of American popular music.

B. World War I

1. Regarded at the time as “the war to end all wars”
2. Watershed event in the cultural history of the United States

C. Migration

1. From the country to the city and from South to North
2. The ready availability of jobs
3. Development of the national transportation system during and after the war

D. Major changes in American society shaped changes in popular music.

1. Many luxuries were within the reach of the middle-class: automobiles, telephones, phonographs, radios.
2. Phonographs, radio broadcasts, Hollywood films, and tabloid newspapers began to create a unified national popular culture.

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- E. The 1920s was also a period of mass law-breaking and social conflict.
1. Modern organized crime rose to new heights during this period.
 2. This increase in crime was in response to possibilities for illegal profits offered by the 18th Amendment, which prohibited the sale and transport of alcohol (1919–33).
 3. The KKK and other racist, anti-immigrant groups flourished during the 1920s.
 - a) Although African American traditions increasingly and directly influenced the popular culture of white America, the boundaries of racial segregation remained rigid.
- F. The incredible profits in the music business solidified the centers of influence established at the end of the nineteenth century, especially the big music publishing firms and record companies in New York City.
1. Organizations were set up to control the flow of profits from mass-reproduced music.
 2. The phonograph was introduced into millions of American homes.
 3. Advances in recording technology encouraged the development of new performance styles.

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4. Radio networks broadcast the latest songs and artists coast to coast, allowing people separated by thousands of miles to hear the same music simultaneously.
5. The world of vaudeville entertainment went into a gradual decline and was supplanted by big musicals in New York City’s prestigious theater district, Broadway.
6. Hollywood films with synchronized sound—the “talkies”—became an important medium for promoting songs and “star” entertainers.
7. Los Angeles began to compete with New York City as a center of the national entertainment industry.
8. Increasingly, the mass media shaped the daily experience of Americans, not only in the big cities but also in towns and small rural communities throughout the country.

II. Technology and the Music Business

A. During the 1920s and 1930s, the production and consumption of popular music was deeply influenced by new technologies, including radio and sound film, and by new institutions designed to protect the rights of composers and music publishers.

B. The record industry expanded rapidly after World War I.

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- C. The introduction of radio combined with the Great Depression caused a precipitous decline in the record industry.

- D. The music industry increasingly relied on phonograph records, rather than sheet music, as the main means of promoting songs and artists.

- E. By the early 1920s, nearly one hundred million records were being pressed each year in the United States.

- F. By the mid-1920s, total national sales of phonograph discs surpassed those of sheet music for the first time.

- G. Acoustic recording
 - 1. An early process in which sound vibrations were transferred directly into the recording medium (cylinder or disc) by means of a large horn or cone

 - 2. Replaced by electric recording in 1925

- H. Electric recording
 - 1. Sound vibrations are converted into an electrical signal before recording.

 - 2. The electrical signal is converted back into sound for playback.

- I. Radio

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1. 1920: First three commercial radio stations in the United States established (KDKA in Pittsburgh, WWJ in Detroit, WJZ in Newark, NJ)
2. 1926: First nationwide commercial radio network established (National Broadcasting Company [NBC])
3. 1927: Over 1,000 radio stations in the United States
4. During the Great Depression, people who could not afford to buy a phonograph and discs were sometimes able to purchase a radio receiver and thereby enjoy a wide range of programming.

J. Sound film

1. Introduced in 1927
2. Became an important means for the dissemination of popular music
3. The first film to exploit sound successfully was *The Jazz Singer* (1927).
 - a) Based on a successful Broadway play and starring Al Jolson, a vaudeville superstar of the 1910s and 1920s
4. Beginning in 1929, the Great Depression wiped out smaller film studios and consolidated control in the hands of the major studios.

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5. In the period leading up to World War II, film became an increasingly important venue for popular music, challenging Broadway musical comedies and vaudeville shows.
6. By the 1930s, many of the biggest Tin Pan Alley song-publishing firms had been bought up by Hollywood film companies.

K. Licensing and copyright agencies

1. Set up to control the flow of profits from the sale and broadcast of popular music
2. ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers)
 - a) Founded in 1914
 - b) Forced all business establishments that featured live music to pay fees (“royalties”) for the public use of music
 - c) Previous copyright protection did not provide composers, lyricists, and publishers with any compensation from live performances of their music.
 - d) After a series of legal battles, eventually reaching the Supreme Court, ASCAP won its case (1917).

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- e) All hotels, theaters, dance halls, cabarets, and restaurants were required to purchase a license from ASCAP before they could play music written or published by a member of the organization.
- f) Similar rulings were later handed down regarding radio stations and motion picture studios.
- g) By the 1920s, almost all leading publishing houses and composers belonged to ASCAP; by the mid-1930s, some ten million dollars in licensing fees was being paid annually.
- h) In the period between the two world wars, the music industry exerted firm control over the production and promotion of popular music.

III. "Freak Dances": Turkey Trot and Tango

1. At the beginning of the twentieth century, several changes took place in American social dancing.
2. Most important was the intensified influence of African American dance.
 - a) Starting around 1910, the craze for orchestrated versions of ragtime songs gave rise to a succession of fads loosely based on black styles, including the turkey trot, the bunny hug, the grizzly bear, and the most popular, the fox-trot.

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- b) The turkey trot was banned in some places because it was seen as a threat to public morality.
- c) Syncopated dance orchestras flourished and played a variety of songs and styles to accompany these new dances.
- d) They included popular Tin Pan Alley songs arranged for singers and dance bands, or simply for instrumental ensembles.
- e) African American bandleaders such as W. C. Handy and James Reese Europe composed ragtime arrangements specifically for the ballroom, and popular white orchestras soon followed suit and included such songs in their repertoire.

IV. James Reese Europe and the Castles

A. Vernon and Irene Castle

- 1. The biggest media superstars of the World War I era
- 2. Husband-and-wife dance team who did more than anyone to change the course of social dancing in America
 - a) Attracted millions of middle-class Americans into ballroom classes
 - b) Expanded the stylistic range of popular dance

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- c) Established an image of mastery, charisma, and romance that later bore fruit in the work of dance teams such as Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers
 - d) Made syncopated dance acceptable to the mainstream
 - e) Brought the latest dance styles within reach of millions of Americans by simplifying the dance moves
 - f) Created a simple way to learn dances such as the fox-trot and the tango
3. Fox-trot—created by Vernon and Irene Castle
- a) Danced to W. C. Handy’s music
4. The tango
- a) Developed in the late nineteenth century in Buenos Aires, Argentina
 - b) Blended European ballroom dance music, Cuban habanera, Italian light opera, and the ballads of Argentine gauchos (cowboys)
 - c) Achieved mass popularity in 1913 when the Castles introduced it in a Broadway revue titled *The Sunshine Girl*
5. The Castles’ promotional campaign

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- a) A clear predecessor of the sort of cross-merchandising that is now commonplace in American show business and professional sports
- b) The Castles’ names appeared on clothing, phonograph records, books, and magazines.
- c) Savvy marketing campaign masterminded by the New York City socialite Elizabeth Marbury
- d) Franchised their names and photographic image

B. James Reese Europe (1880–1919)

- 1. African American musician and bandleader
- 2. Born into a middle-class family in Mobile, Alabama
- 3. In 1889, moved with his family to Washington, D.C.
 - a) Studied violin and music theory from the assistant director of the U.S. Marine Corps Band
- 4. James Reese Europe in New York City
 - a) Moved to New York City at the age of 22
 - b) Found few opportunities for black musicians

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- c) Played ragtime piano in cabarets
- d) Directed the music for several all-black vaudeville revues
- e) Clef Club

(1) In 1910, founded the Clef Club

(2) A social club, booking agency, and trade union for African American musicians in New York City

5. Affiliation with the Castles

- a) In 1913, the Castles attended a society party in New York City where they danced to Europe’s Clef Club Orchestra.
- b) Afterward, the Castles made Europe their musical director.
- c) From 1913 to 1918, Europe composed music for all of the Castles’ “new” dance steps and provided musicians for their engagements.

6. Europe’s Society Orchestra

- a) In 1913, Europe’s Society Orchestra became the first black group to sign a contract with a record company.
- b) Europe’s band was noted for its superior ability to perform syncopated ragtime and tango arrangements.

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7. The Hell Fighters Band

- a) In 1916, Europe enlisted in the Fifteenth Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, an all-black outfit.
- b) He was soon asked by the commander to form a military band.
- c) His troop was forbidden by U.S. Army regulations to fight alongside white soldiers in World War I, so the outfit was transferred to the French Army, which had already accepted African troops.
- d) Europe’s company was known as the “Hell Fighters.”

(1) Played several concerts in Paris

(2) Had a successful concert tour

(3) Made recordings for *Pathe*, a French company with a studio in New York

8. In May 1919, Europe was fatally stabbed by one of his musicians.

9. Listening: “Castle House Rag”

- a) Performed by James Reese Europe’s Society Orchestra
- b) Recorded in 1914

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c) The form of the song is typical of the ragtime style, with a series of themes arranged into a larger structure.

d) This song documents the transition between ragtime and syncopated dance music.

(1) Faster tempo than traditional ragtime

(2) Instrumentation—popular dance orchestra

(3) Syncopation

V. The Jazz Craze

A. Overview

1. The next stage in the “African Americanization” of ballroom dance music
2. Until World War I, the major influence on syncopated dance music was ragtime.
3. The so-called jazz craze began during WWI and continued through the 1920s.

B. New Orleans jazz

1. The earliest style of jazz originated in New Orleans around 1900.

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2. New Orleans was home to a unique mix of white, Creole, French, Spanish, and black communities.
3. This cultural mix helped form a hybrid musical culture unlike that in any other American city.
 - a) The term “jazz” carried multiple meanings in New Orleans.
 - (1) Strictly musical references (“speeding up” or “intensifying”)
 - (2) A variety of sexual associations
4. New Orleans’s diverse musical traditions included
 - a) marching bands,
 - b) Mardi Gras and funerary processions,
 - c) French and Italian opera,
 - d) Caribbean and Mexican music—“the Latin tinge,”
 - e) Tin Pan Alley songs, and
 - f) African American song traditions.
 - (1) Sacred (the spirituals)

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(2) Secular (the blues)

5. Early jazz bands

- a) Dance bands of the period typically included some combination of violin, guitar, mandolin, and string bass, and sometimes a wind instrument (clarinet or cornet).
- b) “Hot” or “ratty” ragtime-based music was being performed in New Orleans by the 1890s, largely as an accompaniment for dancing.
- c) This sort of music was played at dance halls or honky-tonks such as the Pig Ankle and the Funky Butt.
- d) The rowdy contexts for social dancing encouraged the addition of instruments such as the drum set, cornet or trumpet, trombone, and clarinet, which could project over the noise of a boisterous crowd.

C. Jazz becomes popular music: The Original Dixieland Jazz Band

1. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB)

- a) Made the first recording with the name “jass” in New York
- b) White group from New Orleans

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- c) The leader of the group, Nick LaRocca (1889–1961), had started playing “hot music” with other white musicians as a teenager.
- d) The ODJB played for two years in Chicago before coming to New York City, where they created a major sensation.

2. Recordings

- a) They landed a recording contract with Victor Records.
- b) Their recording of “Livery Stable Blues” and “Dixieland Jass Band One-Step” was released in March 1917.
- c) Within weeks, they created a national fad for jazz music.
- d) Their biggest hit was their 1918 recording of “Tiger Rag,” composed by LaRocca.

3. Controversy

- a) The relationship of the music played by the ODJB on the first phonograph recordings designated as “jazz” to the style played by African American musicians in New Orleans
- b) The ODJB were white musicians who played, and helped commercialize, a form of music pioneered by African American musicians.

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- c) Nick LaRocca falsely claimed that white musicians in New Orleans had invented jazz.

D. King Joe Oliver and the Creole Jazz Band

1. The first representative recordings of New Orleans–style jazz were made by “King” Joe Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band.
2. His band included the cornetist Louis Armstrong (1901–71), who went on to become a major figure and one of the great improvisers in the history of jazz.
3. Compared with the ODJB’s recordings, the Creole Jazz Band’s have a more relaxed and flowing rhythmic feeling; the syncopations are smoother and less jerky.
4. Improvisation plays a more prominent role in the Creole Jazz Band.
5. ODJB’s recordings are rooted in the past—a tradition of semi-improvised ragtime ensemble playing,
6. The Creole Jazz Band’s recordings, featuring the brilliant young cornet player Louis Armstrong, point toward the future of jazz.

E. Listening: “Tiger Rag”

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1. Recorded by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1918
2. Front line—three wind instruments: cornet, clarinet, and trombone
3. Rhythm section—piano and trap set
4. Collective improvisation
 - a) One of the most significant musical elements of New Orleans–style jazz
 - b) Each instrument in the ensemble plays a specific role in the music:
 - (1) The cornet typically carries the main melody.
 - (2) The clarinet weaves a countermelody in and around the cornet’s.
 - (3) The trombone plays a simple countermelody or bass notes of chord.
 - (4) Often, the trombone slides or smears from one note to the next.
 - c) Like most rags, “Tiger Rag” consists of a series of musical phrases of regular length, presented one after the other and varied to hold the listener’s interest.

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- d) “Tiger Rag” contains no strongly identified melody.
- e) Sense of novelty in musical tricks
 - (1) “Stoptime”
 - (2) Instrumental techniques (the glides and slides played by the trombone and clarinet)
- f) The energy level remains high throughout the performance, peaking at the “shout chorus.”

VI. Dance Music in the “Jazz Age”

A. The “Jazz Age”

1. An era in American popular culture, sparked by the success of the recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band
2. The impact of jazz on the popular music mainstream represented an important cultural shift.
 - a) A new subculture emerged from the white upper and middle classes, symbolized by
 - (1) the “jazz babies” or “flappers” (emancipated young women with short skirts and bobbed hair) and

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(2) the “jazzbos” or “sheiks” (young men whose cool yet sensual comportment was modeled on the film star Rudolph Valentino).

3. This movement involved a blend of elements from “high culture” and from popular culture.

4. The jazz craze represented the intensification of African American influence on the musical tastes and buying habits of white Americans.

B. Noble Sissle (1899–1975) and Eubie Blake (1883–1983)

1. Began their career with James Reese Europe’s orchestra in 1916

2. In 1921, Sissle and Blake launched the first successful all-black Broadway musical, *Shuffle Along*.

a) This show, which included jazz-influenced songs such as “I’m Just Wild about Harry,” was innovative in a number of regards.

b) It was one of the first shows to portray romantic relationships between black characters without resorting to degrading stereotypes.

C. Racism in the Jazz Age

1. The world of dance orchestras remained strictly segregated.

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2. The most successful black dance bands of the 1920s were able to extend their appeal across racial boundaries.
 - a) The most popular black dance bands were listed in the mainstream popular catalogs.
 - b) African American musicians appeared with increasing frequency in fancy downtown cabarets and hotel ballrooms (although they could enter these places only as employees, not as customers).
 - c) During the late 1920s, white jazz fans began to frequent nightclubs in African American neighborhoods.
 - d) In New York’s Harlem and the South Side of Chicago, these “black and tan” cabarets offered their predominantly white clientele an exotic array of jazz music, floor shows with scantily clad dancers, fancy drinks, and images of Africa and the Orient.
 - e) Performing at Harlem’s famous Cotton Club, the great jazz pianist and composer Duke Ellington developed a style that he called “jungle music,” featuring dense textures and dark, growling timbres.
3. The most economically successful dance bands of the 1920s and 1930s were led and staffed by white musicians.

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D. Dance bands during the 1920s and 1930s tended to specialize in one of three styles: “hot,” “sweet,” or “Latin.”

1. Hot bands

- a) The Coon-Sanders, Nighthawks, the Jean Goldkette Orchestra, and the Casa Loma Orchestra
- b) Specialized in syncopated jazz arrangements
- c) Popular at college dances

2. Sweet bands

- a) Played romantic and nostalgic music
- b) Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians

(1) Ridiculed by jazz fans for its “cornball” or “Mickey Mouse” style

(2) Went on to sell over one hundred million records

(3) “Charmaine!” was released by Columbia Records in 1927 and was the first of Lombardo’s twenty-six Number One hits

(4) This recording is a good example of the sweet dance band style.

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3. Latin bands

a) Xavier Cugat’s Waldorf Astoria Orchestra

b) Don Azpiazu and his Havana Casino Orchestra (1930)

(1) Played music to accompany ballroom adaptations of South American and Caribbean dances

(2) Reignited national fascination with Latin American music and ballroom dance steps

c) Listening: “El Manicero”

(1) Recording opens with the clave rhythm

(2) Complex ensemble texture with interlocking parts

(3) Solo trumpet and solo voice

VII. The “King of Jazz”

A. Paul Whiteman (1890–1967)

1. Early career

a) Born in Denver, Colorado

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- b) Began studying music at the age of seven and joined the Denver Symphony Orchestra as a violist at seventeen.
- c) Initially encountered syncopated dance music in San Francisco before World War I
- d) Soon thereafter, he formed a seven-piece dance band, which played around San Francisco until 1916, when he enlisted in the navy.
- e) During the war, he directed a forty-piece concert band, where he was able to work out some of the basic principles of his approach to “symphonic jazz.”
- f) After the war, his band played at a hotel in Los Angeles, becoming a favorite of Hollywood film stars, and in 1919, he moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey.

2. “Whispering”

- a) Recorded at the Victor studios after Whiteman had begun a long engagement at the Ambassador Hotel
- b) The first of an amazing string of hit records by Whiteman
- c) Contained the musical seeds of Whiteman’s future successes

(1) Arrangement played at a medium tempo

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(2) A straightforward, bouncy fox-trot rhythm

(3) Appropriate for ballroom dancing in the style popularized by Irene and Vernon Castle

d) Between 1920 and 1934, the Whiteman band had 28 Number One records and 150 records ranking among the Top 10, a feat unmatched by any other recording artist in the history of American popular music.

3. Whiteman’s symphonic jazz

a) A mixture of syncopation and careful arrangement, rhythmic pep and gentility

b) The 1924 debut of George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* Featured Whiteman’s band

4. Mainstreaming of jazz music

a) The improvised “hot” music pioneered by musicians in New Orleans was fiercely criticized by members of the religious and political authorities for its influence on white youth.

b) Jazz was widely associated with feeble-mindedness, crime, and immorality, and explicitly linked with immigration and interracial sex as primary causes of national degeneration.

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- c) Whiteman widened the market for jazz-based dance music and paved the way for the Swing Era.