

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGZh9VUIIVs>

Jazz and the Roaring 20s

http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_roaring.htm

The decade following World War I would one day be caricatured as "the Roaring Twenties," and it was a time of unprecedented prosperity — the nation's total wealth nearly doubled between 1920 and 1929, manufactures rose by 60 percent, for the first time most people lived in urban areas — and in homes lit by electricity. They made more money than they ever had before and, spurred on by the giant new advertising industry, spent it faster, too — on washing machines and refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, 12 million radios, 30 million automobiles, and untold millions of tickets to the movies, that ushered them into a new fast-living world of luxury and glamour their grandparents never could have imagined. Meanwhile, at the polls and in the workplace as well as on the dance floor, women had begun to assert a new independence.

Nothing quite like it had ever happened before in America. And by the mid-1920s, jazz was being played in dance halls and roadhouses and speakeasies all over the country. The blues, which had once been the product of itinerant black musicians, the poorest of the southern poor, had become an industry, and dancing consumed a country that seemed convinced prosperity would never end. There were "all-girl" orchestras on the road now — including Babe Egan's Hollywood Red Heads, a band billed as the Twelve Vampires, and the Parisian Red Heads, all of whom actually came from Indiana. More than 100 dance bands regularly criss-crossed the wide-open spaces between St. Louis and Denver, Texas and Nebraska, playing one-nighters. They were called "territory bands" — the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks; the Alphonso Trent and Doc Ross and Troy Floyd and Benny Moten Orchestras; the Deluxe Melody Boys and Happy Black Aces; Jesse Stone's Blue Serenaders; George E. Lee and his Singing Novelty Orchestra; Walter Page and his Blue Devils; and Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy. "People didn't think anything about going 150 to 200 miles to dance back in those times," one territory band veteran remembered. They'd say, "We came 200 miles to see y'all."

Meanwhile, radio and phonograph records — Americans bought more than 100 million of them in 1927 — were bringing jazz to locations so remote that no band could reach them. And the music itself was beginning to change — an exuberant, collective music was coming to place more and more emphasis on the innovations of supremely gifted individuals. Improvising soloists, struggling to find their own voices and to tell their own stories, were about to take center stage.

But for many of the millions of people for whom the 1920s never roared at all, fearful of such rapid change and nostalgic for the small-town America of the turn of the century, jazz music came to seem not merely an annoyance but a threat, one more cause of loosening morals and frightening dislocation. Ragtime had been bad enough, with its insinuating rhythms and daring couple-dancing, but the jumpy, rancorous version of New Orleans polyphony projected by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and many of its imitators seemed much worse. "As I understand it," said Professor Henry Van Dyck of

Princeton University, "it is not music at all. It is merely an irritation of the nerves of hearing, a sensual teasing of the strings of physical passion. Its fault lies not in syncopation, for that is a legitimate device when sparingly used. But "jazz" is an unmitigated cacophony, a combination of disagreeable sounds in complicated discords, a willful ugliness and a deliberate vulgarity." The editor of *Musical Courier* reported on a poll of academically trained musicians: most found "the 'ad libbing' or 'jazzing' of a piece ... thoroughly objectionable," he said, "and several of them advanced the opinion that this Bolshevistic smashing of the rules and tenets of decorous music" spelled disaster for American music.

For some, jazz simply became synonymous with noise. Thomas Edison, whose invention of the phonograph had made its sudden rapid spread possible, claimed that he played jazz records backward because "they sound better that way." When the *New York Times* reported that the citizens of one Siberian village had driven hungry polar bears from its streets by banging pots and pans, the headline read "Jazz Frightens Bears," and when a celebrated British conductor collapsed while visiting Coney Island, the same paper blamed the jazz bands — now loudly competing with one another along boardwalk — for his demise.

Jazz — and the dancing it inspired — was also said to be having a catastrophic impact on the national character. "Moral disaster is coming to hundreds of young American girls," reported the *New York American*, "through the pathological, nerve-irritating, sex-exciting music of jazz orchestras." In just two years in Chicago alone, the Illinois Vigilance Association reported in 1923, the downfall of one thousand girls could be traced directly to the pernicious influence of jazz music. In Cincinnati, the Salvation Army obtained a court injunction to stop construction of a theater next to a home for expectant mothers on the grounds that "the enforced proximity of a theater and jazz palace" would implant dangerous "jazz emotions" in helpless infants. A social worker reported on the "unwholesome excitement" she now encountered even at small-town dances in the Midwest. "Boy-and-girl couples leave the hall in a state of dangerous disturbance. Any worker who has gone into the night to gather the facts of activities outside the dance hall is appalled ... by the blatant disregard of even the elementary rules of civilization ... We must expect a few casualties in social discourse, but the modern dance is producing little short of holocaust."

Beyond its disturbing sounds, its fast pace, and its supposed impact on morals, jazz was also condemned because of its origins. Many white older Americans were appalled to see their children dancing to music that was believed to have emerged from what the music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* called "the Negro brothels of the South." "Jazz," said the editor of *Etude*, "is often associated with vile surroundings, filthy words, unmentionable dances." It was originally "the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer," declared Mrs. Max Obendorfer, national music chairman of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, "stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds ... [It] has also been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate barbarity and sensuality." Blacks were not the sole sources of the jazz contagion. The critic Carl Engel also worried about the effects on Anglo-Saxon youth of what he called "Semitic purveyors of Broadway

melodies," while Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* blamed what it called "the abandoned sensuousness of sliding notes" on sinister Jews.

There was nothing new in these attitudes. Twenty years earlier, many whites had deplored ragtime in part because it was based on black songs and dances, just as their descendants would one day denounce rock 'n' roll because of its links to the African-American blues tradition. But something altogether new really was happening here and there across the country. A few white youths — living in small towns and comfortable suburbs as well as big-city slums — started to see more than mere novelty and excitement in this new primarily black music, began actually to hear their own feelings mirrored in the playing of African-Americans, and to look for ways they might participate in it themselves. In a country in which by law and custom blacks and whites were forbidden to compete on anything like an equal basis in any arena — even boxing (the heavyweight title was then off-limits to black challengers) — these young men were willing to brave a brand new world created by black Americans and in which black musicians remained the most admired figures.

Jazz Musicians of the 1920s

Louis Armstrong:

Louis Armstrong rose to fame in the 1920s. His mentor had been Joe "King" Oliver. Oliver had often sent Armstrong out on jobs that he could not fit into his schedule. In 1919 Oliver went to Chicago, leaving Louis to fill his place in the best jazz band in New Orleans, that of Kid Ory. In 1921, King Oliver wired Armstrong from Chicago and asked Louis to join him in Chicago's Lincoln Gardens. This was a pivotal point in Armstrong's life. Armstrong felt that New Orleans was his home, but he admired King Oliver too much to reject the offer. Later in life, Armstrong stated, "His (Oliver's) calling for me was the biggest feeling I had musically." In Chicago, Oliver utilized Louis' harmonic talent by improvising a line, and letting Louis complete the melody. This awed jazz enthusiasts, and word of Louis' talent spread throughout the city. While King Oliver was Armstrong's mentor, his talent as a soloist dimmed in comparison to Louis'.

Louis married for the second time in 1924, to jazz pianist Lil Hardin. She encouraged Louis to break off from Oliver's band in 1924. He accepted a position with Fletcher Henderson, the leader of one of the most prestigious dance halls in New York City. It was from Fletcher Henderson that Louis learned about composition and music terminology. Through this band, Louis was able to directly influence the sound of the dance hall jazz. At the Rosewood Ballroom on Broadway, Armstrong added the classic New Orleans sound to the sophisticated sound of the popular jazz. Amazed by Louis' talent and unique sound, Henderson incorporated Louis' rhythmic improvisation. It was readily apparent that Louis was the best jazz soloist on Broadway. Louis was back in Chicago by 1926. From 1925-1928, Louis Hot Five and Hot seven recordings were made. These works, along with several collaborative recordings with Earl Hines, were Louis most important works of the 1920s. After the 1920s, Louis fronted for the big bands of

the 1930s and forties. Louis Armstrong and a very long and successful career. He influenced the direction of jazz music and improvisation. Louis Armstrong was the first "super star" of jazz music

Jelly Roll Morton:

Jelly Roll Morton was the first great composer of jazz music. He was also one of the first jazz musicians to travel the country and spread the "New Orleans Sound." Morton was also an outstanding performer. Having grown up in New Orleans, Morton excelled as a jazz pianist and vocalist, and was influenced by regional musical styles. By 1925, Morton had settled in Chicago, and recorded his compositions. While Louis Armstrong was changing the direction of jazz music, Jelly Roll Morton was recording with the Red Hot Peppers in the New Orleans style, which stressed collective improvisation over the soloist style of Armstrong. After a move to New York in 1928, Morton faded into relative obscurity. He failed to alter his style and was upstaged by artists favoring soloist improvisation.

Duke Ellington:

The 1920s served as Ellington's road to fame and fortune. Ellington was born in Washington, DC., and began his musical career there with his first band, Duke's Serenaders. In 1923, Duke moved to New York, where he would be embraced for his musical brilliance. Between 1923 and 1927, Ellington solidified his future in the entertainment industry of New York. The Washingtonians (Ellington's band) had regularly played Club Hollywood, which later became Club Kentucky. After his last season at the Club Kentucky in 1927, The Ellington Orchestra accepted a job at the Cotton Club. They became famous for their "Jungle Nights" show, and were hired for a permanent position at the renowned Cotton Club. Jazz fans, both African American and white, crowded in to hear Ellington's Orchestra. It was during this time when Ellington began to diligently compose music. Over the next forty years, Ellington became one of the most important composers of the twentieth century.

Earl Hines:

Earl "Fatha" Hines irrevocably influenced the evolution of modern piano styles. Having played in Pittsburgh for several years, Hines moved to Chicago in 1923. In Chicago, Hines found himself in high demand with the top jazz bands in the city. Hines and Louis Armstrong became acquainted while Hines was with Carroll Dickerson's band in 1926. After playing gigs together occasionally, they recorded King Oliver's duet, "Weather Bird." Hines was unique in his piano style in the 1920s. His improvisation and counter rhythms impressed Armstrong and other famous jazz musicians. In 1928 Hines started his own band, which played at the Grand Terrace. Over the next 20 years, many famous musicians passed through the Grand Terrace Band, including: Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Eckstein, and Charlie "Bird" Parker.