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The Influence of Black Vaudeville on Early Jazz

By WILLIAM HOWLAND KENNEY III

American jazz, in its early search for a home, passed through the world of Afro-American vaudeville and musical theater. As a result, the musical development of jazz was influenced by show business and the particular possibilities and constraints then imposed upon popular, black theater music. Jazz, an art based on the complex principles of improvisation, outgrew its early years in musical theater, but that medium left its mark on the literature and on its underlying harmonic grammar.

For many years after the "discovery of jazz" by European and American writers, it was fashionable to minimize the role of vaudeville in its growth. Those interested in writing about jazz tended to be whites either on the left side of American politics or outside the American system altogether. Thus Otis Ferguson, Sidney Finkelstein, Hugues Panassié, and Robert Goffin all portrayed jazz as a folk music played for an exclusively black audience.[1] This confusion of jazz with country blues satisfied certain political preconceptions but obscured the urban, theatrical origins of jazz. There was no logical reason for this distortion, for the actual world of black show business in the post-World War I era had more than enough heroes of the downtrodden who were struggling against racist restrictions.

The exceptionally fertile years of black-American musical theater from 1898 to 1933 were forgotten after the stock market crash and the depression had destroyed the vulnerable financial structure of Afro-American theater. The smash hit, all-Negro show *Shuffle Along* of 1921 had been produced on a slender budget, and the several important shows which followed in the path of the Sissle and Blake musical were funded in equally precarious fashion. When, in the *coup de grace*, the movies replaced live entertainment, black vaudeville music was practically lost to history.

The roots of jazz have been left to wither in the steady transplantation of the music into the world of concert-hall art. Only a tiny minority of the jazz pioneers would have thought of their jazz in the manner in which it is now perceived. While there seems to have been no doubt from the start about the cultural and artistic importance of the blues, it took time for the complex musical possibilities of jazz to gain general recognition.[2] For many years, from 1918 to at least 1925, the year Louis Armstrong's great OKeh

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recordings with the Hot Five amazed the musically aware, jazz inhabited two worlds: that of its musicians, who knew what they had, and that of the world of show-business, novelty, and popular music.

The wonderfully creative years which followed the first world war were a culmination of a long tradition of black-American show music. Emerging from the nineteenth-century world of minstrelsy, Afro-American musicians poured an unusual amount of creative energy into their theatrical music. Undoubtedly such highly trained musicians as Will Marion Cook, William Vodery (whose work was so important to George Gershwin), J. Rosamund Johnson (the composer, brother of James Weldon Johnson), and R. Nathaniel Dett would have worked in prestigious, concert-hall circles had not racial discrimination prevented it; as it was, their energies were channeled into popular musics—with important results for jazz.[3] The frustrated ambitions of Will Marion Cook, who had studied music at Oberlin College and under the renowned Josef Joachim in Berlin, led to his producing Broadway's first Negro musical-comedy revue, *Clorindy, the Origin of the Cakewalk*, in 1898. The show caused a sensation on Broadway and launched a Golden Era for black, show-business performing artists.

From about 1900 into the 1920s a number of vaudeville theaters catering to mostly black audiences sprang up in the major cities of the American Midwest and South. Innumerable black performers toured the circuit among these theaters, moving from one to the other, year after year. By 1920 the theaters had been organized into the Theater Owners' Booking Association (hereafter, T.O.B.A.). By 1924 T.O.B.A. included eighty-five theaters.

Vaudeville—which comprised skits, comedy acts, monologues, song-and-dance routines, musical duets, jazz bands, and eventually even scenes in silent films—fostered the development of novelty music. The production of unusual sounds on radically unorthodox instruments like washboards and saws was considered comic, and it encouraged musicians to produce bizarre sounds on legitimate musical instruments. During the immediate post-war years such comical effects were predominant in the music known to the public as "jazz."[4]

Father of the Blues W. C. Handy, who toured widely with his blues bands on the black vaudeville circuit in his early career, later recalled that before use of the term "jazz" became common, the music was called "novelty music." Handy hired such top musicians as Wilbur Sweatman, who had been a musical director of the Pekin Theater and was a celebrated producer of novelty music. While Sweatman's vaudeville act featured blues and jazz, his main gimmick was his performance of "The Rosary," which he played on three clarinets in three-part harmony, blowing on the three mouthpieces simultaneously.[5]

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The influential James Reese Europe, who in 1918 took jazz to France with his 369th Infantry Band, called "the Hell Fighters," toured the vaudeville circuit with his band when he returned to the United States after the Armistice. Although best remembered for his promotion of jazz, Europe also promoted and performed novelty music. One week before his tragically premature death, he spent the evening in the famous Royal Gardens Cafe on Chicago's South Side, where he praised the "precision" and "taste" of the resident band, which featured novelty music as well as jazz.[6] The club had a capacity of 2,000 customers and a dance floor holding 500 couples! One of the best-known exploiters of novel sounds during this period was drummer Charles ("Buddy") Gilmore, whose rack of gadgets attracted the attention of many drummers and whose performance did much to help define the role of the trap-drum in early jazz.[6]

The famous Original Dixieland Jazz Band, an all-white novelty band, which made the first "jazz" records in 1919, featured barnyard noises in its hit "Livery Stable Blues," and, like most of the early jazz groups, posed for publicity photos in which the band members assumed all manner of dramatic postures and attention-getting grimaces. Similarly, Charles "Doc" Cooke's all-black Syncopated Orchestra, featured at Chicago's Dreamland and at White City, a South Side amusement park, recorded novelty numbers like "Scissor grinder Joe" and "Hot tamale man," which included street noises and "laughing" cornets. Pioneer jazz-clarinetist Jimmie Noone, who was a Cooke mainstay, provided many of the droll effects.[7]

This use of novelty music was one way, although admittedly superficial, in which vaudeville molded early jazz, but there was a more fundamental relationship between the two musics. The birth of jazz coincided with concentrated artistic and commercial movements to establish black musical theater on Broadway. The years immediately following World War I saw a full-fledged drive of black vaudevillians toward developing materials that would attract interracial audiences, and much of the literature of early jazz came from this now forgotten, but startlingly fertile, period of the years 1921-1930.

Among the early signs of this Afro-American musical renaissance, which developed concomitantly with the fabled Harlem Renaissance in literature, was the emergence of black female vocalists, who in growing numbers performed to popular and critical acclaim on the vaudeville stage. First came Mamie Smith, whose recording in 1920 of vaudevillian Perry Bradford's "Crazy Blues" became a smash-hit. Smith was followed by a legion of others: Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters, Lucille Hegamin, Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, Trixie Smith, Lovie Austin, Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, and many more. The most successful of these vocalists generally featured jazz bands

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on stage as part of their acts, but where budgets were pinched, they called upon pianists, who accompanied from the stage or the pit.

The confluence of several developments—the public's infatuation with the black female vocalist, the swift moves of several black musicians into the field of sheet-music publishing, the founding of a black-owned record company (the Pace Phonograph Company), and the production by white companies of phonograph records featuring black artists—swelled public interest in black musical entertainment and laid the groundwork for the explosion of jazz in the twenties. Good songwriters were crucial to the process of satisfying public demand for fresh material in vaudeville, cabaret, recording, and Broadway-stage performance. One observer has estimated that during this period there were at least twenty-two leading jazz songwriters, who published nearly 2,000 songs. [8] This simultaneous and intense work of a sizeable group of composers laid the foundation for a remarkable musical movement.

If we limit discussion to the most prominent black songwriters of the show-business world, the list must certainly include Spencer Williams, Clarence Williams, Thomas "Fats" Waller, Maceo Pinkard, James P. Johnson, J. C. Johnson, Henry Creamer, Edgar Dowell, Chris Smith, Eubie Blake, Noble Sissle, Perry Bradford, "Duke" Ellington, W. C. Handy, Fletcher Henderson, and "Jelly Roll" Morton.

Some of these pianist/showmen were better known than others, and the names of a few are still remembered today. But celebrated or obscure, they all were influenced by the world of vaudeville. One need only recall Fats Waller's rakishly tilted bowler, the frequent appearance of Jelly Roll Morton's name in the vaudeville column "A Note or Two" of the Chicago *Defender*, or the extravaganzas staged by Duke Ellingon at the Cotton Club. A distinction must be made between those pianist/leaders of jazz bands—for example, Morton, Ellington, and Henderson—who wrote primarily for their bands, and the songwriters who wrote primarily for, and accompanied, stage performers. These last, especially Pinkard, Creamer, Smith, Dowell, and J. C. Johnson, made a greater mark on jazz literature than is usually recognized.

While the great, white songwriters—Berlin, Kern, Gershwin, Rogers, Porter, and Arlen, among others—became legendary during their lifetimes, black songwriters generally were inconspicuous, at least so far as the general public was concerned. Sheet-music covers usually carried the portraits of the white performers who were popularizing the music rather than those of the songwriters. Notwithstanding their obscurity, these black songsmiths produced songs which were welcomed by both black and white stars of the stage and, as well, by jazz musicians of the period. And because the tunes received repeated recording, they were turned into standard numbers of the early jazz repertory.

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The first of these important tunes began to appear in the opening decade of the century. Chris Smith, a vaudeville comedian, attracted wide attention when top-star comedian Bert Williams used Smith's "You're in the right church but the wrong pew" (1908) in his climb to stardom.[9] Such tunes of Smith's as "Ballin' the jack" (1913), "Down in honky tonk town" (1916), and "My last dollar" (1920) all were written originally for the vaudeville stage, and "Ballin' the jack" became an important hit.

Vaudevillian Henry Creamer contributed several important tunes to the repertory, including "After you've gone" (1918), "Way down yonder in New Orleans" (1922), "Dear old Southland" (1921), and "If I could be with you one hour tonight" (1930, with James P. Johnson as co-writer). Creamer toured widely on vaudeville circuits throughout the U. S. and in Europe with J. Turner Layton, with whom he wrote a number of songs that found their way into Broadway productions, including shows of the legendary Flo Ziegfeld. In 1922 the two vaudevillians produced the music and the book for *Strut Miss Lizzie* and, as well, played leading roles in this Broadway musical, whose title song became a standard of early jazz literature. Songs like these were widely distributed as sheet music and widely recorded on player-piano rolls and disks. Without these avenues of distribution, few white Americans would have had knowledge of the special world of black vaudeville which produced the music in the first place.

As has been observed, the 1920s saw the growth of Afro-American musical theater, both vaudeville and on Broadway, which of course led to an increase in the number of songs being produced for these entertainment forms. Two relatively obscure songsmiths, J. C. Johnson and Maceo Pinkard, seem to have contributed more than their share to the repertory. Johnson, writer of the famous "Empty bed blues" (recorded by Bessie Smith in 1928), "Louisiana" (1928), "The joint is jumpin' " (1937), and "Dusky stevedore" (1928), collaborated often with Fats Waller, who recorded a famous version of "The joint is jumpin'." Johnson and Pinkard both became hit-song writers when in 1923 Ethel Waters recorded Johnson's "You can't do what my last man did" and in 1925, Maceo Pinkard's "Sweet Georgia Brown." (I shall return later to discussion of Pinkard.)

Waters, the leading performer in early black vaudeville, had begun her career singing strictly ethnic material—notably, the blues—but was persuaded to broaden her repertory by including popular theater songs in her acts, such as, for example, Pinkard's "Mammy o' mine" (1919).[10] She climbed quickly to stardom, proving to be popular with audiences of both races, thanks to her very precise pitch, a bright ringing soprano, superb enunciation, and visual sophistication. Her vehicles got exposure on the powerful white circuits as well as on T.O.B.A. circuits, and the black tune-

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smiths whose vaudeville songs she sang shared in her success. One historian has explained the phenomenon as follows:

Vaudevillians carrying a song on a circuit, touching every major American city and smaller ones, became a powerful agency for promotion. Publishers could always tell when a certain vaudeville headliner played a specific city by the sudden spurt of sheet music business from that place. And, because a vaudevillian retained a single act for a number of years (or until the circuit had been covered two or three times), a song could be kept alive in public interest for an indefinite period . . . . the younger publishers of Tin Pan Alley came to realize that the first problem in their business was to get a vaudevillian to use their songs.[11]

Once a vaudeville star had agreed to feature a song, it usually was recorded on one of the so-called "race records" labels of OKeh, Paramount, Columbia, and other companies, including the Black Swan label of Pace's company, the all-Negro owned-and-operated recording company that was founded in the 1920s. The economic parameters for an important movement in Negro popular music which, in its turn, helped to define the early jazz literature, were set up by the confluence of T.O.B.A., race-record companies with aggressive executives like Clarence Williams, the important Q. R. S. piano-roll company, and a relatively small number of sheet-music publishers. Since the performing arts were among the few professional activities open to black Americans after World War I, and since the war itself had generated money in the newly-forming ghettos in northern cities, particularly the community of Harlem in New York City, conditions existed for the founding of a full-fledged artistic movement. The war played a significant role in this movement also in that it initiated a vogue for "the primitive" (that is, the black man and his culture) among white artists and intellectuals in the post-war period. Naturally, black vaudevillians and other show people made efforts to respond to the possibilities for creative development offered by the various forces, and jazz music was pulled along. Both musics were shaped by the artistic conventions and aesthetic standards of the time, which permitted performing artists to plan for the expectations of their audiences.[12]

Inevitably there are certain analogies that can be drawn between the careers and song output of the vaudeville songwriters and that of the jazz tunesmiths. They seemed to prefer the same melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic vocabulary, so that their tunes, while maintaining individuality, nevertheless share many features in common. An excellent example of how vaudeville and early jazz became intertwined during the 1920s is found in the career and compositional output of Maceo Pinkard (1897-1962), who wrote at least five tunes that became important vehicles for early jazz improvisation.

Born in Bluefield, West Virginia, Pinkard received some formal

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musical training at the Bluefield Institute. About 1914 he migrated to Omaha, Nebraska, where he later ran a theatrical and musical booking agency. After traveling widely, Pinkard arrived in New York around 1920 and settled there in midtown Manhattan, as close as he could get to the heart of the music-publishing business. In the immediate postwar years, his name turns up frequently in the vaudeville notices of the *Chicago Defender,* where he is identified as a song plugger for this or that song that is linked to such vaudeville stars of the day as Billy E. Jones.[13]

Pinkard was remarkably productive. Before the "jazz craze" began in the early 1920s, Pinkard wrote primarily straight theater music. Table 1 gives a chronological listing of his most popular songs, of which the first to attract the attention of jazzmen was "Mammy o' mine," recorded in 1919 by the non-improvising Original Dixieland Jazz Band.[14]

Table 1. Songs of Maceo Pinkard

"Don't cry little girl, don't cry" (1918)
"Who'll love you while I'm gone" (1918)
"You'll be sorry" (1919)
"Just leave it to me" (1919)
"Honey Rose" (1919)
"Mammy o' mine" (1919)
"Jazz babies' ball" (1920)
"Wonderful pal" (1920)
"Liza" (1922)
"Planning" (1922)
"My old man" (1922)
"Sweet man" (1925)
"Sweet Georgia Brown" (1925)
"Gimme a little kiss, will ya', huh?" (1926)
"There must be somebody else" (1927)
"Here comes the show boat" (1927)
"Dawning" (1927)
"Sugar" (1927)
"Don't be like that" (1928)
"Lila" (1928)
"At twilight" (1929)
"That wonderful boy friend of mine" (1929)
"Congratulations" (1930)
"Them there eyes" (1930)

In addition to his vaudeville songs, Pinkard produced tunes and orchestrations for the early jazz orchestras of Fletcher Henderson, Paul Whiteman, and Jean Goldkette, among others, and some of these were recorded.

Table 2. Orchestral Arrangements of Pinkard Songs

"Those draftin' blues," W. Sweatman, Col A-2645, 17 August 1918

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"Dixieland is happyland," Happy Six, Col A-2929, 28 February 1920
"I'm always stuttering," Moulin Rouge Orch. Regal 9366, October 1922
"Down where they play the blues," Mary Stafford, Col A-3390, March 1921
"Potomac River blues," Fletcher Henderson, Voc B14740, 22 December 1923
"I'm feeling devilish," F. Henderson, Har 974-H, 6 April 1928
"Come on, baby," F. Henderson, Col 14392-D, 12 December 1928

Pinkard's orchestral recordings offer insight into the artistic development of jazz in its early years and thus provide information about its early history. The first three recordings listed are rhythmically stiff, but the two-beat-to-a-measure motives and staccato performances are enlivened with many novelty effects, including but not limited to a prominently featured, tailgate trombone, eighth-note rhythms on the wood blocks, and Sweatman's "wailing" clarinet. There are frequent passages wherein improvisation is mixed in with big-band-style arrangement, but none of the musicians improvises harmonically. Instead, they elaborate on, and decorate, the melody with what are often comic effects.

There is plenty of rhythmic awareness on the composer's part, however, particularly in the novelty number "I'm always stuttering." Here Pinkard cleverly interweaves several rhythmic patterns in order to get the effect he wants, using staccato syncopes over hesitating rhythmic pauses (see Example 1).

From the late 1920s on, the driving beat characteristic of jazz in that decade begins to emerge in Pinkard's music. "Come on, Baby" and "I'm feelin' devilish" stress eighth-tied-to-sixteenth-note patterns and pay little attention to melody *per se*. These are "rhythm" or "jump" tunes, whose few melodic notes are played for rhythmic effect. "Come on, Baby," for example, hammers away on a piquant figure (see Example 2). Most of the impact of these recordings derives from the performance of the Henderson band rather than from the music itself. There is not enough intrinsic development of the materials for jazzmen to want to long remember these numbers.

The Pinkard songs that appealed enough to jazz musicians to become favorite jam-session material were those first made famous on the vaudeville stage by Ethel Waters. After the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded "Mammy o' mine," Pinkard was drawn into the jazz world. The song is full of Jolsonesque schmaltz and teary nostalgic lyrics, with little to indicate why the jolly white giants of Dixieland chose to record it. Although the sheet music calls for a slow and tender treatment, jazzmen never played it that way. One reason lies perhaps in the provocative syncopation of its repetitive

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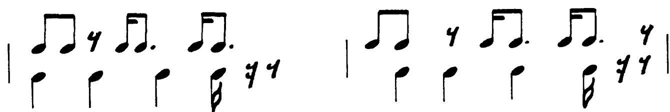
Example 1



Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

phrases (see Example 3). When the tune was resurrected in the "Dixieland revival" spawned by World War II, it got an old-time, vaudeville song-and-dance treatment from Eddie Condon's Orchestra, with a satiric solo from clarinetist Pee Wee Russell, who apparently found little of worth in it.[15]

Pinkard's next vehicle for Waters, "Sweet man" (originally entitled "A Charleston swing song"), better represented the jazz spirit of the 1920s than did his earlier numbers. This number immediately caught the attention of Jelly Roll Morton, who made a piano-roll recording of it in December 1925 (Capitol Piano Roll 1334), fixing it as a minor classic of the era. Pinkard wrote the syncopated-Charleston, anticipation beat right into the melody line (see Example 4). The lyrics of the ubiquitous Roy Turk, who also wrote the lyrics to "Walkin' my baby back home" and "Mean to me," gave Ethel Waters plenty to work with:

T. N. T., gasoline, even nitroglycerine,
Ain't got the kick of the kisses I get now . . .
Sugar buns, honey combs, apple pie and ice cream cones,
Don't half compare with the sweetness of the smile of my honey. . . .[16]

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Although Pinkard's "Sugar" was not published until 1927, Water's great success with it came in 1925 after she recorded it for Columbia Records. This is a ballad number; the lazy melody line contains only a hint of jazzy sophistication. The importance of the vaudeville song in the developmental stages of early jazz literature is amply demonstrated by this number. Ethel Waters's crystalline enunciation of the punning lyrics attracted jazzmen from the beginning and has continued to do so over the years. No fewer than seventeen recordings of "Sugar" have been made; the performing forces include the famous—among them, Fletcher Henderson, Louis Armstrong, the Benny Goodman Quartet, Chicago Rhythm Kings, Teddy Wilson, and Alberta Hunter—as well as relatively unknowns.

The Waters-Pinkard connection had become mutually profitable by the mid-1920s, and it peaked with Waters's recording in 1925 of "Sweet Georgia Brown," a song which became one of the most enduring jazz standards of all time. There were three collaborators on this one: Pinkard wrote the tune; Ben Bernie, the comedian, bandleader, and show-business personality put it on the map; and Kenneth Casey, Sr., wrote the lyrics. Like "Sweet Man," this song was meant to be performed brightly; it features plenty of invigorating rhythmic accents (see Example 5). A difficult piece for vocalists, "Sweet Georgia Brown" became one of the most frequently recorded tunes in jazz history after Ethel Waters recorded it. A list of its recordings would include some of the most celebrated jazz groups of the time, as well as obscure ones; the number of recordings is well over three dozen.

Very few songs have been chosen as often for subsequent jazz reworking as "Sweet Georgia Brown"; in this regard it belongs in the class with George Gershwin's "I got rhythm." The standard approach to "jazzing" favorites such as Pinkard's song was to retain the chord changes but to replace the original melody with a riff figure either made famous on an earlier recording or concocted on the spot.

One example of the many reincarnations of "Sweet Georgia Brown" is "Sweet Clifford," recorded by the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet. Brown was a driving but lyrically inventive improviser who was likely to produce something original if sufficiently inspired. An interesting but familiar progression of chords, like those used by Pinkard, was all he needed. After the group states the riff figure, the soloists take over (see Example 6).

The melody line of "Them there eyes," like that of "Sweet Georgia Brown," has a natural jazz feel. The last of Pinkard's vaudeville hit songs to become a jazz standard, it failed to win the popularity of its predecessor. The melody is not so much a development of line as a repetition of a rhythmic figure that sounds like

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Example 5

Example 6

Example 7

a jazz riff. The beat of early swing is suggested in its motives (see Example 7).

One problem in looking at songs like this one in retrospect is that their harmonies appear quite predictable, and this is disturbing to some jazz critics.[17] "Them there eyes," like "Sugar" and most of "Mammy o' mine," is structured on a diatonic progression which seldom strays from the established movement of major and minor triads and the dominant seventh. This is employment of harmonic grammar on its most basic level: movement away from the tranquility and respose of the tonic is limited to chords built upon unaltered notes of the scale. Such progressions are reassuring to the listener; they fulfill his expectations. "Sugar," for example, is simply a working and reworking of basic tonic-dominant progressions.

But not all of the vaudeville songs of black writers of the 1920s are so limited harmonically; many songs employ at least a limited amount of chromaticism, some more than others. Pinkard's "Sweet man," for example, moves quickly to secondary dominants after its tonic opening in F major: F - E_7 - A_7 - D_7 - G_7 - C_7 - F. The second through the fifth of these chords have no "function" in the key of F major; they are altered chords which serve primarily to

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disturb the assurance of a secure key center, allowing the music to move away from basic progressions and to imply (although not carry out) modulations to other keys. Inevitably this creates a feeling of instability, of restlessness, and arouses tension that would be lacking in wholly diatonic progressions.

This technique is a major artistic convention of the tunes written for black vaudeville. The songwriters lead the listener into uncharted harmonic regions, suspend him there while moving restlessly from one secondary dominant to another, avoiding the the solidity of dominant-to-tonic changes and thus delaying the repose that comes with the cadential resolution. Since the songwriters were working for song-and-dance acts, it seems plausible that this convention was rooted in a practical function. What could be more appropriate for a "rhythm tune" intended to accompany animated dancing?

The chorus of Pinkard's "Sweet Georgia Brown," is another clever exploration of secondary-dominant harmony; it begins with altered chords and does not arrive at a diatonic chord until the ninth measure. It is this kind of dissonance, which is buried in the secondary dominant-seventh chord, that gives the songs of the "roaring twenties" their "hot" sound.

The writers of popular songs used altered chords and secondary functions in their music, but without abandoning the customary expectations governing the tonal distances between these chord types. For example, the chord progressions in "Sweet Georgia Brown" maintain the conventional interval of a descending, perfect fifth between the chord roots even though the chords themselves are chromatic. There are few modulations in the tunes of Maceo Pinkard; even the bridges (releases) typically consist of short harmonic sequences employing melodic motives previously heard, rather than clear-cut modulations with contrasting melodic content.

The artistic conventions of black vaudeville songwriting passed on into the early jazz literature; in addition to those already discussed, they included the Charleston-beat rhythms and the early swing-beat patterns. Jazz musicians built collective and individual improvisations upon these structures, bringing to the music more sources of tension and forms of surprise (among other effects), and thus laid the basic grammatical foundation for the popular-song literature of early jazz.

The mark of show business was left on these songs, not only in the lyrics, which were soon forgotten, but in the music itself. Before becoming vehicles for jazz creativity the songs were performed on vaudeville and musical-theater stages. Show-business musicians like Blake and Sissle, Pinkard, Waller, and others tried to take advantage of the improved race-relations climate of the twenties by

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moving their show music away from vaudeville, where it played primarily to race audiences, to Broadway, where the audiences were larger and interracial and the financial rewards were more substantial.

In order to appeal to the general, theater-going public, this show music had to remain accessible, that is, to stay within the range of popular music conventions. Whereas jazz could focus upon the creative manipulation of musical elements for purely musical reasons, which led to some quite esoteric sounds that had little popular appeal, this was not possible for writers making daring but financially vulnerable efforts to attract Broadway audiences.

In 1922 Maceo Pinkard wrote the music and many of the lyrics for *Liza,* an all-Negro show, which opened on Broadway at Daly's 63rd Street Theater on 27 November 1922, moved in December to the Bayes Theater in Times Square, and ran for a total of 169 performances.[18] (Additional lyrics were written by Nat Vincent.) Critics likened the show to its predecessor, Sissle and Blake's famous *Shuffle Along,* and praised its music and dancing, but not the book. The show boasted two major stars, Gertrude Saunders, who had sung in *Shuffle Along*, and dancer Maude Russell; it introduced some exciting dances; and it featured two, fine Pinkard songs—the title piece "Liza" and the waltz "My old man" (later recorded in 4/4 meter by Leo Watson and the Spirits of Rhythm; Brunswick 6728, 01698).

Clearly the songs of Maceo Pinkard, like those of the other black vaudeville songwriters, were meant for popular consumption, and as long as jazzmen used them, jazz remained a popular art. Jazzmen could depend upon these songs. They could execute some of their most gravity-defying solos without having to worry about where the chords were going, for they knew that most songs were variations on diatonic and secondary-dominant harmonies. Accustomed to building solo lines on the notes of the chord progressions, instrumentalists could assume that the next chord was likely to be a descending, perfect fifth away. That assurance left them more time for setting-up their favorite solo tricks.

As these popular songs were recorded and rerecorded, they became harmonic ceremonies in the rites of the jam session, where spontaneous improvisation was based upon the jazzman's ingrained knowlege of chord changes. Post-World War II jazz musicians became famous for putting a new melody over the chords to "Sweet Georgia Brown" and producing a fresh-sounding piece of music full of the solo confidence which comes from the performer knowing instinctively where the harmony leads.

Of course a composer like Duke Ellington broke these harmonic conventions, producing such songs as the haunting and challenging "Sophisticated Lady" (1933), which employs chro-

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matically descending, dominant-seventh chords in rapid harmonic rhythm.[19] Another song that challenged the harmonic conventions of the twenties was Johnnie Green's "Body and Soul" (1930), with its difficult chromatic progressions and half-step modulations, which served as a testing ground for progressive musicians.[20]

From the point of view of the 1920s, however, all that was still in the future. The use of songs with relatively simple harmonies had both musical and economic value for jazzmen. They were just discovering the solo flights, the interesting and flamboyant twists, the split-second turns in line which Louis Armstrong pioneered. If a tune's harmonic rhythm was too fast, the soloists wouldn't have time to highlight, and thus exploit the sensitive notes of the chords. Similarly, if the chords departed too far from diatonic expectations, the jazzman would have to study them more extensively in order to execute effective solos. In the giddy atmosphere of discovery that was prevalent in the late-hours jam sessions of early jazz, it was important to have material available for experimentation that was solid and harmonically uncomplicated.

Vaudeville songs met this need. And inevitably such tunes as "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Sugar" reminded listeners of hit songs of the past—of the stage, of recordings, and of sheet music. Jazz had to sell itself in the world of show business; one good way to do so was to feature the most accessible elements of show-music hits infused with its own complex and subtle solo art. Thus the jazz number typically opened with a direct statement of the melody, which established the proper nostalgic connection between the jazz version and its show-music prototype, and it was not uncommon for one of the musicians to take a vocal chorus at some point, not necessarily because he had an interesting voice but to further fix the non-improvisational origin of the song into the listener's mind. Finally, jazz pieces often concluded with a fairly straight restatement of the melody after a series of improvised choruses.

The demise of vaudeville was brought about by the stock market crash, the "great depression," and the arrival of the movies; with these catastrophic events vaudeville's active influence on jazz music came to an end. Pianists like Maceo Pinkard, who had supported and directed the course of vaudeville, turned to other sources of livelihood, becoming speakeasy musicians, music publishers, dance-band arrangers, and Hollywood songwriters.

The legacy of vaudeville to jazz was not an unmixed blessing. The former had a long tradition as a form of show business and, at the same time, a rich foundation in the artistic manipulation of music fundamentals. The art of survival for jazz musicians rested in their abilities to juggle these two often incompatible elements; some leaned toward the glitteringly familiar, and others ventured into

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unfamiliar musical territory. Moving too far in either direction leads to problems. With jazz moving into the concert hall as a fine-art music, much of the popular audience has turned to rock-and-roll. Jazz has paid a price for its rejection of its vaudeville roots.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Chamberlain and Robert Wison, eds., *The Otis Ferguson Reader* (Highland Park, IL: December Press, 1982). Sidney Walter Finkelstein, *Jazz: A People's Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948). Hugues Panassié, *Hot Jazz: A Guide to Swing Music* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1936). Robert Goffin, *Aux Frontieres du Jazz* (Paris, France: Editions du Sagittaire, 1932).

2. The New York *Amsterdam News* and the Chicago *Defender* for the postwar years clearly reveal that the black press realized the cultural significance of the blues before it came to an understanding of the meaning of the word "jazz."

3. Biographical data for these artists are drawn largely from Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); Southern, *Readings in Black American Music*, 2d. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 160-230; and Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: A. Knopf, 1933).

4. Joe Laurie, Jr., *Vaudeville, From the Honkey-Tonk to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), 64-65.

5. Biographical data for these artists are drawn largely from W. C. Handy, *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); Roger D. Kinkle, *The Complete Encyclopedia of Popular Music and Jazz* (New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House Publishers, 1974); Eileen Southern, *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Tom Fletcher, *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business*, Rpt. ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984).

6. See further in the Chicago *Defender* (city ed.), 10 May 1919, 9.

7. See, for example, Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine, *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1982). On Cooke, see Orrin Keepnews and Bill Grauer, Jr., *A Pictorial History of Jazz* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1955).

8. According to Frank Driggs in Nat Shapiro, ed., *Popular Music: An Annotated Index of American Popular Songs*, vol. 5 (New York: Adrian Press, 1968), 36.

9. Biographical data drawn from sources cited in note 5 and the Smithsonian Institution, Oral History Project, "J. C. Johnson" (typescript) March 1980, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ.

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10. Ethel Waters and Charles Samuels, *His Eye Is On The Sparrow: An Autobiography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1951), 129; Frank Driggs, "Ethel Waters' Greatest Years," liner notes to Columbia KG 31571; Southern, *Biographical Dictionary*, 393.

11. David Ewen, *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), 29.

12. In regard to the concept of cultural influence on art, see the important article by Howard S. Becker, "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 39 (December 1974): 767-776.

13. See, for example, the Chicago *Defender*, 14 June, 2 August 1919; 14 February 1920.

14. The total number of Pinkard copyrighted songs is 184. Because of space limitations, a list of the songs is not included in the present article, but interested readers may contact me for further information (Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242).

15. Recorded 21 January 1942; Mx-R4307-1, Commodore 1509.

16. Carole Leigh and James Dapogny have recently given this an effective revival: "Stomp Off S.O.S." 1064.

17. Alec Wilder has observed that "Them there eyes" skirts cliché, but does not explain his reasons. See further in Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 470.

18. See further in the *New York Amsterdam News*: 28 March 1923; 16 May 1923; 15 August 1923.

19. The song's harmonies are explored in John Mehegan, *Jazz Improvisation*, vol. 1 (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1959), 68.

20. Ibid., 49.

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