

ASF 2016 Study Materials for



Ain't Misbehavin'

The Fats Waller Musical Show

conceived by Murray Horowitz & Richard Maltby

Director
James Bowen

Set Design
Jesse Dreikosen

Costume Design
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Characters

(the "characters" are identified by the names of the five actors in the first Broadway cast)

André, a party hound, a flirt, and a bit of a womanizer

Armelia, a voluptuous and sassy woman, strong-willed and not afraid to speak her mind

Charlaine, a sweet, innocent young lady

Ken, a jovial, cheerful, loud man, larger than life

Nell, a confident and charming woman of the world

Welcome to *Ain't Misbehavin'* and the Music of Fats Waller

This joint is about to start jumping!

Your toes will tap, your shoulders will jive, your head will bob along with some of the most infectious swing America has ever created, the music of Thomas "Fats" Waller and some others who shaped the feel of the 1920s, '30s, and early '40s. This musical revue is like one big rent party or club show on stage at ASF—the great stride music of Fats Waller with performers singing and dancing his musical tales of love, longing, and the zest for life.

The pitch for the Broadway show reads "A sassy, sultry musical celebration of legendary jazz great, Fats Waller." Sassy, yes. *Sultry*, yes. *Musical*, oh, yes indeed. *Legendary*, just listen. So there's every reason for *celebration!*

In his review of the 1988 Broadway revival, *New York Times* drama critic Frank Rich proclaimed that the show "conjured [a] between-the-wars dream world.... This musical anthology expands beyond its form to become a resurrection of a great black artist's soul ... Perhaps the key to the musical's approach ... is its willingness to let Waller speak simply and eloquently for himself, through his art...."

So get ready see what *behavin'* means to Fats Waller.



Life magazine's portrait of Thomas "Fats" Waller

Song List for *Ain't Misbehavin'*

- Act 1: "Ain't Misbehavin'" (1929)
 "Lookin' Good but Feelin' Bad"
 "'T Ain't Nobody's Bizness"* (1923)
 "Honeysuckle Rose" (1935)
 "Squeeze Me"(1926)
 "Handful of Keys"* (1929)
 "I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling"(1929)
 "How Ya Baby"
 "Jitterbug Waltz"*
 "Ladies Who Sing with the Band"
 "Yacht Club Swing"
 "When the Nylons Bloom Again"
 "Cash for Your Trash"
 "Off-Time"
 "The Joint Is Jumpin'"
 Act 2: "Spreadin' Rhythm Around"*
 "Lounging at the Waldorf"*
 "The Viper's Drag" (1934)
 "Mean to Me"*
 "You Feet's Too Big"*
 "That Ain't Right"*
 "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now" (1937)
 "Find Out What They Like"
 "Fat and Greasy"*
 "Black and Blue" (1929)
 "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter"*
 "Two Sleepy People"*
 "I've Got My Fingers Crossed"*
 "I Can't Give You Anything but Love"* (1938)
 "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie"*
 "Honeysuckle Band"

* song by another composer; Waller made a hit
 • some or all lyrics added for the show



Kyme and Jim Weaver
in ASF's 1995
Ain't Misbehavin'

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"Fats Waller was an irresistible force of humanity. He let us know—in ways nobody had—that we're all in this thing together."

—Murray Horowitz



For Discussion

In considering why Fats Waller's music may have been overlooked for several decades, Horowitz wryly says: "After all, he was an artist of what was considered the disposable world of American popular culture."

- What in "pop culture" today might be considered "disposable" but may prove to have real value? Why?

Source: Murray Horowitz "Fats Waller Now, Fats Waller Forever" on "Fats Waller Forever" website @ <http://newarkwww.rutgers.edu/ijs/fw/contemp.htm>

Murray Horowitz on the Genesis of the Show *Ain't Misbehavin'*

How Horowitz Met "Fats"

As a teenager, Murray Horowitz was already deeply involved in music; specifically, he was a jazz fan, which meant he listened to records of jazz greats and cultivated his "ear." He also wanted to perform comedy. One day in the Dayton, Ohio Public Library he checked out Fats Waller's album *Valentine Stomp*.

He was smitten, because he realized Waller "is the point where those two art forms meet: he is the greatest jazz pianist who ever tried to make people laugh, and the greatest comedian who ever played jazz." So he bought every piece of Waller's music he could find. Horowitz was surprised to learn the 1960s did not share his passion for Waller; in fact, the world had largely forgotten his music and moved on to the Beatles. So Horowitz took action: "I was able to turn my passion into the Broadway

musical, *Ain't Misbehavin'*. But the reason for the success of that show," Horowitz insists, "was overwhelmingly the excellence and universal appeal of Fats Waller."

Horowitz on the Appeal of Fats Waller

Universal—not music for some but music for all. Horowitz believes "[Waller's] target audience was all of us." In his music, Fats Waller "isn't just letting us know what the real deal is; he's reminding us that we already know what it is. And he's letting us know that he knows we know.... The one way that works is if, on some level, we all share some common traits, some values, some needs. Fats confirms that for us. He lets us in on it with his fingers, his smile, his voice, and his eyebrows, which ... always let you know there was at least one more joke inside the one he'd just told."

Waller's music also helps us deal with our human flaws: "in his pianism, in his compositions, in his voice, in his very physical presence, he continually contrasts a heavy assertiveness with a light elegance."

Horowitz wanted this show because "nobody has ever played stride piano better than Fats Waller." Recordings keep his music alive for new audiences, but sharing the "freshness, energy, and dazzle" of that music live on stage can demonstrate exactly why Fats Waller is one of the men whose compositions "[changed] the course of American popular piano music."

"We think of thunder in the left hand, but it is as much about the wit and suppleness in the right. Challenging the rhythm, swinging hard, balancing the heaviness and the lightness, **Fats gives us a way to make sense of modern life.**"

—Murray Horowitz

The Nature of a Revue

A revue is a collection of song, dance, and/or skits rather than a piece telling an coherent through-story supplemented by song and dance—that art form is known as the Broadway musical. *Ain't Misbehavin'* combines songs that Fats Waller composed, collaborated on, or recorded in his signature style.

Fats Waller wrote for the early all-black Broadway shows *Keep Shufflin'* (1926), *Load of Coal* (1928), and *Hot Chocolates* (1929). Later he composed *Early to Bed* (1943), the first non-black Broadway show composed by an African American.

Richard Maltby, Jr. and Murray Horowitz give this revue a loose thematic shape by organizing the material in Act 1 on the sweetness of love and the joy of music, plus some war-themed songs, then in Act 2 turning to New York City, partying, dancing, and the heartache and crises of love, ending with a glittering medley of tunes Waller made hits.

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Under Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., during the 1920s **Abyssinian** was the largest Baptist church in the U.S., with over 20,000 members and an extensive social program



James P. Johnson was the pioneer of stride piano, thus bridging ragtime and jazz with blues flavor. He was the favorite accompanist of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith and a major composer and recording artist who influenced most major jazz pianists.



Timeline for Thomas "Fats" Waller: The Master of Stride Piano

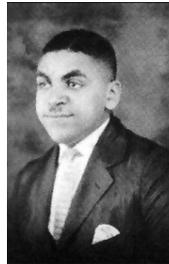
Thomas Waller, called "Fats" from his childhood, was born into music and made it his life, moving through church music to ragtime to the new stride piano jazz, from street corners to film houses and rent parties to piano rolls, from clubs to revues and Broadway, from Harlem to Ohio and Hollywood and Europe—the evolving worlds of music from 1915 to 1943.

Fats Waller's Life and Musical

Journey: Youth and Training

• **1904:** Born to Rev. Edward Waller, a lay preacher with the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, and Adeline Waller, an organist—the youngest of their eleven children, only five of whom survived.

• **1910-1919:** His mother taught him classical music and the organ and later hired a piano tutor, while the church's music director started him on musical basics using J. S. Bach. He played for the family's street revivals and in the school orchestra and also learned the string bass and violin, but dropped out of school at 15.



• **1918-1922:** In 1918 he won a talent contest performing "Carolina Shout" by James P. Johnson, the show piece by the father of stride piano, which Waller learned from a player piano). Waller then trained with the organist at the Lincoln Theatre playing for silent films and took over that job in 1919, and in 1921 became organist at the premiere Harlem film theatre, the Lafayette. His father, who wanted him to become a preacher, opposed his musical choices. Waller also had a short, disastrous early marriage.

• When his mother died in 1920, pressures led Waller to leave home and move in with the family of Russell Brooks, a pianist who introduced him to James P. Johnson. Recognizing Waller's talent, Johnson mentored him in stride piano style and the works of 19th-century composers.

• Johnson got Waller started making piano rolls in 1922-23, and Waller's distinctive style proved very popular.

• He also met Willie "the Lion" Smith [a wartime nickname], the other great stride pianist in Harlem, and played his first nightclub gig by sitting in for Smith at Leroy's and spellbinding the audience.

• His jovial personality and his musical ability made Waller a hit performing at clubs and at Harlem rent parties.



Willie Smith, a stride piano master, won himself a piano as a child and became an influential "musician's musician" who played more than he recorded.



All Fats needed was a piano and then the joint was jumpin' and the rent got paid

Rent parties

were necessitated by the exorbitant rents white landlords charged in Harlem. During Prohibition, the rentee set the date, an entry fee got you in to dance, and you could buy bootleg liquor at a party that might go on 'til dawn.

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Records, sheet music, radio, and tours fed Fats' fame



Timeline of Thomas "Fats" Waller/ 2

Waller's Career

- **1922-1931:** Encouraged to compose, in 1922 he made his first recording, "Muscle Shoals Blues," and then a second tune, "Birmingham Blues," which he composed in the studio for Okeh records (a "race" label). He also began appearing on radio.
- In 1926 he began recording with **RCA Victor**, which in 1929 produced solos of his own compositions, a now-famous set.
- Collaborates with Johnson on the Broadway show *Keep Shufflin'* [the follow-up to *Shuffle Along*, the first all-black Broadway show, 1928] and *Load of Coal*.
- In 1927 he met **Andy Razaf**, a poet/lyricist who collaborated with Waller on some of his biggest hits. Their first joint work was songs for the Broadway musical *Hot Chocolates* (1929), which
- He has two NYC radio shows in 1930-31.
- Tours to Paris in 1931, the first of several European tours.
- **1932-1939:** Waller begins a regular radio show in Cincinnati (on WLV, one of the most powerful stations in eastern U.S.) called "Fats Waller's Rhythm Club" from 1932-34 and formed his sextet, which records more than 400 songs. In 1934 signs an exclusive contract with RCA Victor.
- In 1935, he appears in two Hollywood films, *Hooray for Love!* and *King of Burlesque*, which feed his fame as a comedian [the camera exaggerates his famed style], a recognition he is trying to move beyond, preferring to be known as a serious artist, since he

Fats Waller playing to a soldout house in England

- In 1938 he tours to England and writes his *London Suite*, his longest composition, in six ambitious "locale" pieces. He records them in London on a European tour the next year, a tour cut short by the war.



- **1940-43:** Waller makes frequent recordings and extensive tours of the U.S.
- Waller over-schedules himself, drinks too much, and does not take care of his health.
- In 1943, he makes the film *Stormy Weather* with Lena Horne and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, while continuing to tour and also composing the Broadway show *Early to Bed*.
- Already ill and on a train back to NYC that was delayed in Kansas City, he dies in his sleep of pneumonia on December 15, 1943 at the age of 39.



Andy Razaf

Waller on tour: right, a theatre marquee in England; below, with opening night fans in Edinburgh, Scotland



had very deep classical roots and exceptional piano technique.

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A Quick Tour for the Ear

- Noted modern jazz pianist Dick Hyman illustrates ragtime and stride piano at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eo_365TIB2o

- Dick Hyman explaining stride style at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6tMTIhXkZM>

- NPR segment on stride piano with James P. Johnson and Willie "The Lion" Smith plus Fats Waller examples that play from site:

<http://www.npr.org/2010/04/12/125689840/stride-piano-bottom-end-jazz>

- Fats Waller playing "Ain't Misbehavin'" in *Stormy Weather* film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSNPpssruFY>

The Background of Waller's Music: Ragtime to Jazz Piano

The Background: Ragtime

- Before stride there were rags or **RAGTIME**, the hot new piano sound of the early 1900s, popularized by **Scott Joplin** and his "**Maple Leaf Rag**" (and re-popularized by the soundtrack of *The Sting*). The form's heyday was 1897 to World War I.
- Ragtime has African American and Midwestern roots, but the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 made it a nationwide phenomenon.
- **A RAG is a strongly "syncopated melody (usually in 2/4 time) over a regular,**

march tempo bass line." So it's John Philip Sousa in the left hand and something innovative and less regular in the right. The syncopation is the key, the new element. There was also an improvisational element in classic ragtime performance.

- It uses the polka and march forms (4/4 and 2/4 time) with a strong down beat. Like these dance forms, it has three or more 16-bar themes that repeat and reprise and within which 4-bar strains repeat.
- The first mention of "rag" music in 1896 directly links it to the black musical tradition in a chorus with "Negro rag accompaniment."

The Foundation: Jazz

- Unlike ragtime, **JAZZ is based in the blues and its 12-bar progression, though it also incorporates the rag's improvisation.** Louis Armstrong's recordings made jazz popular by 1917, a popularity that exploded in the Twenties.
- This early jazz "allowed for emotional passages by individual soloists or large brass ensembles with strings and drums. **Jazz introduced a new harmonic vocabulary using dynamic rhythms and expressive vocals** reminiscent of Southern plantation blues music."
- Jazz singers and their recordings soared in popularity—Billie Holiday, Ethel Waters,
- Whites flocked to Harlem for the "primitive indulgence," the music's "freedom from restraint"—which was all many heard in these sophisticated and intricate musical developments.



R. B. Nugent,
"Harlem Dancer"

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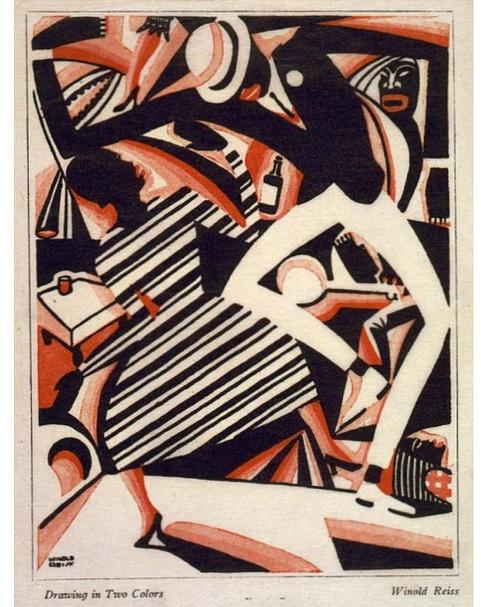


"If an exuberant stage presence was Waller's trademark, musical innovation was his legacy. He raised the Harlem stride style of piano playing ... to a fine art. Fusing elements of blues, classical music, boogie-woogie, and ragtime with stride, Waller fashioned a new sound that was uniquely his own."

Hearing Waller's Music: Jazz to Stride Piano

Stride Piano

Fats Waller made it look so easy, even effortless; he laid his hands on a piano and across the keys they wove and bounced and skittered and flew, making incredible music. Playing stride piano, a form of early jazz, is not for the faint of heart or hand. It requires a deep musical knowledge, acute technical facility, a fully developed sense of style, and improvisational creativity and verve. The greats of stride piano, especially James P. Johnson and Fats Waller, aspired to be classical composers as well as popular music composers, and in their later years both wrote longer concert works in an effort to reach that goal. In fact, stride piano requires that classical foundation, which Fats Waller had.



"Drawing in Two Colors" (also known as "Harlem Jazz") by Winold Reiss, one of many talented Harlem Renaissance artists

- The popularity of the **HARLEM STRIDE** style of piano jazz burst onto the national scene with the recording of James P. Johnson's "Charleston" in 1924, which spurred the most popular dance of the decade (other new dances were the fox trot, the shimmy, the black bottom, and the varsity).
- Stride combines ragtime's syncopation with the progression of jazz, but adds much greater creativity in the bass (the left hand) and more upbeat rhythms. Instead of march rhythms in the bass, it uses split chords—"a four-beat pulse with a single bass note, octave, seventh or tenth interval on the first and third beats, and a chord on the second and fourth beats"—and then sometimes reverses that beat.
- "All jazz pianists before the development of be-bop in the 1940s were initially schooled in the stride style, which remains the most technically challenging of all jazz keyboard idioms...."
- Johnson's "lesson" piece that taught other musicians the stride style was "Carolina Shout," which Waller learned at 15, and he "went on to ensure that the popularity of the stride style continued into the 1930s."
- The stride style could encompass any popular music, and, unlike ragtime, did not rely on sheet music: "True Stride pianists practiced a full jazz piano style that utilized highly creative, often flamboyant devices such as arpeggios, black note slide-offs, varying rhythmic accents, and tension/release."
- At clubs and rent parties, stride pianists were known for their cutting contests, piano duels that flaunted their skills.

Sources: the "Tin Pan Alley: Ragtime, Jazz, Swing & Big Band" web page of the Songwriters Hall of Fame website; "Harlem Stride" on Mervyn Cooke's The Chronicle of Jazz website; "Ragtime" on The Parlor Songs Academy website; "Stride" from Wikipedia

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Why Piano Sheet Music?

- "After the American Civil War, over 25,000 new pianos a year were sold in America and by 1887, over 500,000 youths were studying piano." All those pianists needed sheet music, and as time passed they wanted to play the songs they heard in musical revues, on recordings, and on the radio. Popular music was based on the piano, not the guitar. Moreover, "the lyrics of music from this period suggest that the USA was a peaceful, happy and prosperous place" with "warm memories of happy and innocent times in rural or small town settings.... a reflection of people's desires for how the time and their life should be," not how it was.

The Music Industry of 1910-1940: Tin Pan Alley

- **Tin Pan Alley** is the nickname of the block of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue in Manhattan on which many music publishers had their offices. They promoted songwriters and sold sheet music "aggressively."
- It was a musical phenomenon that made George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and Harold Arlen famous, but it was also a social phenomenon.
- The popular music penned by Tin Pan Alley songwriters was urban music, and the two major groups making the music were part of the outpouring of East European Jews that immigrated to America from the 1880s and the African Americans who headed north in the first two decades of the 20th century in the Great Migration. The confluence of these traditions made American popular music—and made it big business.
- As the scholar Rachel Rubin observes, "in its own time, 'Tin Pan Alley' was an insurgent popular music that was a challenge made by immigrants and their working-class children

Tin Pan Alley Musical Timeline

- 1890s-1953:** music industry in Tin Pan Alley is driven by sheet music sales to adults for home piano play
- 1880s-early 1900s:** influence of European operettas/ "golden age of the ballad"
- 1900-1910:** ragtime, more than 1800 rags written (sheet music plus piano rolls)
- 1912:** W. C. Handy introduces the blues to popular music scene
- 1917:** Louis Armstrong records jazz and the sound skyrockets
- 1920s:** theatre scene combines vaudeville, musical comedy, revues, and variety into the Broadway show
- 1926:** first movie with sound, a "new outlet for production music"
- mid-1930s:** folk and country music go mainstream
- 1930s-1940s:** big band sound and swing
- early 1940s:** Latin American influence
- 1953:** rock-and-roll takes over with teens' shift to records
- mid-1950s:** Elvis seals shift away from sheet music to records



to the dominance of the polite middle-class 'parlor' music of the time. It also borrowed ... from the popular music being created contemporaneously by African American musicians."

- Tin Pan Alley writers "repackaged" ragtime into their own songs, and they relied on the music to sound "black," as Rubin notes, while the lyrics were "national."

Part of West 28th Street known as **Tin Pan Alley**.

- As the timeline indicates, the music business was changing rapidly in the early decades of the 20th century. The Broadway shows after *Showboat* in 1927 told a complete story, and their more tightly organized structure made selling individual songs harder—but just then the film industry opened a new venue for songwriters, and Tin Pan Alley headed west to Hollywood.
- The music of this period is now considered American "classic" music, and the tunes such as Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band," the Gershwins' "I Got Rhythm," "Stormy Weather" by Arlen and Koehler, and Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'" are its cornerstones. At the time, however, they were all seen as ephemeral.

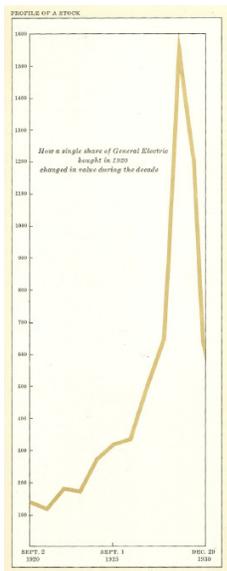
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John Held's cartoon of a flapper doing the Charleston—quintessence of the Roaring '20s



A big city speakeasy during Prohibition—alcohol readily available



The 1929 Stock Market Crash—chart of the value of one share of GE stock from 1920-1930

The Era of the Action: Life between the Wars in the U.S.

American society and culture changed between the world wars, and Fats Waller's music is rooted in his particular Zeitgeist [spirit of the time]. He gives his roar to the Twenties, keeps spirits up in the Thirties, and supports the mobilized country in wartime.

Selective Time Line: Background

1919-20: Prohibition legalized as 18th Amendment to Constitution is ratified, outlawing the manufacture, transport, or sale of alcoholic beverages. Many police participated in bootlegging (in Chicago the police chief said the rate was 60%). Prohibition is repealed in 1933.

1919-1929: The Roaring Twenties

- Life expectancy is 54 years; divorce rate 13%.
- Radio gains popularity.
- Car sales boom; 50% of cars sold are Fords.
- Work day cut from 12 to 8 hours.
- New: Miss America pageant, Wheaties, *Time* magazine, traffic lights, airmail, Baby Ruth candy, radio commercials, Yankee stadium, electric shavers, films with sound, Academy Awards, solo transatlantic flight, Mickey Mouse, the charleston

1929: Stock Market crash in October leads to severe economic downturn

1930-1933: Depth of Great Depression

- Many banks close; 56% of blacks and 40% of whites are unemployed. Wages drop to 60% of 1929 wages.
- Roosevelt's "New Deal" creates jobs and changes national monetary system.
- 5-day, 40-hour work week common
- FBI created due to rising gangster activity (a result of Prohibition)
- Dust Bowl in Midwest begins
- Hitler elected chancellor in Germany
- Cigarette smoking rises
- New: Empire State Building, "Star Spangled Banner" named national anthem

1934-1938: Great Depression eases

- Lower unemployment, fewer bank failures
- Drought-stricken Midwestern farmers move west
- Germany annexes Austria
- Jesse Owens wins 4 gold medals at Berlin Olympics
- New: laundromats, Golden Gate Bridge, miniature golf, last public hanging



1939: War and rising economy

- World War II begins in Europe
- U.S. economy surges due to war
- *Gone with the Wind*, *Wizard of Oz*
- New: helicopter, fad of swallowing live goldfish

1941-1945: World War II for America

- First peacetime draft in 1940
- War declared Dec. 8, 1941 after Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor
- After early defeats in Pacific, U.S. forces begin to win and along with allies gain ground in Europe. D-Day; invasion at Normandy, June 6, 1944. Germans introduce V-1 & V-2 rocket bombs; Japanese begin kamikaze attacks. Napalm-bombing of Tokyo. War in Europe ends May 8, 1945. After dropping two atomic bombs on Japan, war with Japan ends August 15, 1945.
- Rationing of rubber, sugar, gasoline, shoes, canned goods, meat, cheese, and fat in U.S. during war
- Nuremberg war trials begin
- Polio epidemic
- New: M&Ms, the lindy hop dance



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The early village of Harlem



Jacob Lawrence, Panel 1 of the Migration Series (1940-41)

Harlem—Where It All Happened

On the north end of Manhattan Island was a small village that would become Harlem as the population of Manhattan grew steadily northward and engulfed it. In the early 20th century it became a huge village once more, a city within the city—Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance.

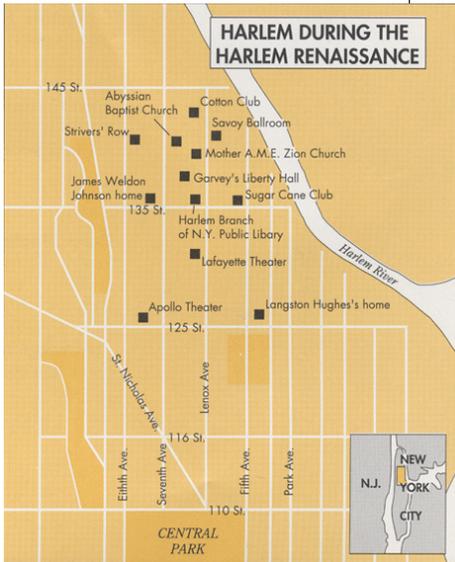
In the 1870s when commuter rail expanded, Harlem became a wealthy white suburb of New York City. There was a housing boom and then a housing bust, and white landlords raised the rents and began to fill the increasingly subdivided houses and apartments with blacks coming north as part of the Great Migration. By 1930 Harlem was one of the most famous black neighborhoods in the U.S.

During the 1920s the Harlem Renaissance made it a major cultural center amid a welter of creative and artistic activity that fed the "New Negro" movement of self-respect and self-dependence. Both the NAACP and the National Urban League had offices

there, and a number of black newspapers moved to the area. Marcus Garvey also brought the headquarters of his Universal Negro Improvement Association. Black writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, and dramatists were fed by Harlem's spirit and renowned by the city's art scene.

Harlem was also a major entertainment district, laden with nightclubs and famous jazz bands, talented dancers and popular singers, many of whom gained national followings. Segregation emerged even in Harlem, for in some clubs black entertainers performed for predominantly white audiences, as at the Cotton Club, famous for its light-skinned chorus girls and Duke Ellington as bandleader from 1927 to 1931.

The Great Depression hit Harlem hard. The neighborhood was economically stagnant, and several civil rights campaigns, such as Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s 1933 "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" initiative aimed at local stores, were centered there. Politics gained momentum, and many churches stepped in to provide social services such as soup kitchens and employment networks for the community.



Harlem map from www.jcu.edu

All Harlem is roughly fifty blocks long and seven to eight blocks wide; in the 1920s there were up to 5000 to 7000 people per block

	African Americans in all Manhattan	Harlem
1890	25,000	(white)
1910	90,000	50,000
1920	150,000	80,000
1930	325,000	200,000

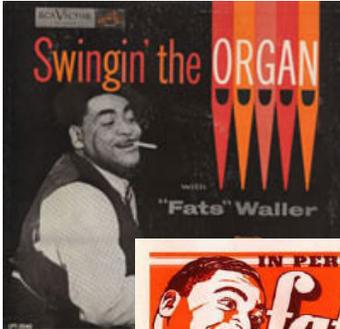


Palmer C. Hayden's *Midsummer Night in Harlem* (1938)

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LOVE SONGS & DELIVERY

- What makes a good love song? Must it be about falling in love? How do those songs work? What about love lost or love gone wrong? How do those songs work?
- Pick a love song you remember from the show and compare it to love songs on the same theme today. Do the ideas change?
- What difference does the delivery of a song make? Fats Waller "sold" other songwriters' works with his style. Can "style" change a song? The end of *Ain't Misbehavin'* is a series of Waller covers; think of examples from music today where a cover makes a difference.
- Pick your favorite song from the show and justify your choice to the class.

Quotations from "A story of Fats Waller" on the "Fats Waller Forever" website

Activities for Working with *Ain't Misbehavin'*

MUSIC AND THE MUSIC BUSINESS

- The Biz of the biz: Compare this account of Waller and Razaf's efforts to market their tunes to Tin Pan Alley with contemporary songwriters' dealings with streaming media:

"Relationships with the publishers were stormy. As a general rule, they would try to buy the rights to the song for next to nothing, or they would 'forget' to pay the royalties. In reaction to these practices, Waller and Razaf would either leave the office in an outrage and rip up their creation, or accept the pathetic sum offered by the publisher and afterwards submit the same song to a second, and then a third publisher. Selling their compositions in this manner allowed them to have a decent income."

—Who does music "belong to," its creators or the marketers/recording companies/streaming media? What is a fair percentage of profit for each? How long did it take for authors and creative writers to get a copyright law? How is that working with the internet?
- There is also a fame factor to these economic conditions: **"Fats was frequently a victim of his own ... total lack of organization in his business dealings. Occasionally, he sold his compositions for next to nothing, compositions which were to become huge hits only shortly thereafter. This was the case for the songs "On the Sunny Side of the Street," "I Can't Give You Anything but Love," and "If I Had You," which according to musicians and close relations were most likely his compositions"** (*punctuation altered*).

—Does it matter if Fats Waller wrote some of the most famous songs of his era but his name is not on them? Why or why not?

—What is more important, doing the good or creative or necessary thing OR getting credit for it? What are the values implicit in each choice?

- What are the issues of an individual creative effort—writing poetry or fiction, composing music, painting, sculpting, staging plays—in context of the need to support oneself? How do money and creativity mix?
- Research Fats Waller's world, especially Harlem and the Harlem Renaissance, the "New Negro" movement, Tin Pan Alley, the Great Migration, East European immigration

WALLER'S MUSIC IN OUR WORLD

- If you have keyboardists or any musicians in your class, have them listen to the stride piano YouTube clips and web links and explain to the class what's cool about stride and what to listen for in the music of the show. Enjoyment is enhanced by appreciation; get into the music.
- How does Waller's stride music sound to our ears? Does it sound like aspects of any popular music now? Does it sound like the music in Broadway shows? Are these songs just golden oldies or are they golden?
- What is the appeal of Waller's music to the modern ear? Would you listen to it on its own or add it on your play list? Why or why not?
- Research the background and influence of African American music on early 20th century music and on music today. Go back to blackface minstrel shows and "coon songs" as well as the "race label" recordings. How new is "crossover music"? What does "crossover" mean in music? Did Elvis, the Beatles, or the Rolling Stones feel/ credit the influence of black music?

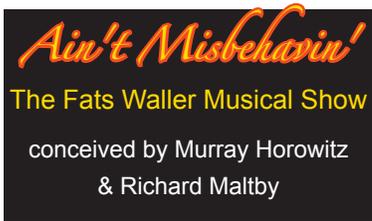


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