

“The Jazz Problem”:  
How U.S. Composers Grappled with the Sounds of Blackness, 1917 – 1925

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*For Hillary Clinton and Terry Allen,  
who both lost the race  
but the fight still rages on*

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation tracks the development of jazz-based classical music from 1917, when jazz began to circulate as a term, to 1925, when U.S. modernism was in full swing and jazz had become synonymous with America. I examine the music of four composers who used black popular music regularly: Edmund Jenkins, John Powell, William Grant Still, and Georgia Antheil. For each composer, whose collections I consulted, I analyze at least one of their jazz-based compositions, consider its reception, and put it in dialogue with writings about U.S. concert music after World War I. Taken together, these compositions contributed to what I call the Symphonic Jazz Era, and this music was integral to the formation of American modernism.

I examine how these four composers grappled with the sounds of blackness during this time period, and I use “the Jazz Problem” as an analytic to do so. This phrase began to circulate in periodicals around 1923, and it captured anxieties about both the rise of mass entertainment and its rootedness in black cultural sounds in the Jim Crow era. For some U.S. modernist composers, jazz offered a compositional ingredient—unique, native, and modern—that could articulate a distinct national style. Yet, the music’s associations with dancing, sex, commercialism, and working-class blackness made it controversial to bring into the concert hall. It is this conflict that fueled “the Jazz Problem” among composers: that jazz was modern but also commercial, that it was uniquely American but also black music.

“The Jazz Problem” for the composers studied in this dissertation was not about *if* jazz belonged in the concert hall but *how*. I argue that these four composers used a series of mutually constitutive dichotomies to negotiate exactly how to depict blackness in their compositions. These composers held different and sometimes contradictory definitions of modernism and jazz, but they articulated them through a common language which contrasted



representations of highbrow with lowbrow, black with white, and the past with the present. These were not the only discursive formations at play but they were the most prominent. They gave meaning and form to concert jazz.

How composers negotiated the intersection of these dichotomies changed radically between 1917 and 1925. Jenkins and Powell wrote compositions in 1917 and 1918 respectively well before the most widely known piece of concert jazz premiered at Paul Whiteman's 1924 Aeolian Hall concert: George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Jenkins and Powell placed jazz idioms alongside other common modes of depicting blackness: the Spirituals and Stephen Foster tunes. In 1925, Still and Antheil wrote pieces at the height of the symphonic jazz vogue when the language of representing blackness in the concert hall had changed to jazz. They used jazz as a bold challenge to concert hall norms. A comparison between the early compositions of Jenkins and Powell and later compositions by Still and Antheil shows changes in approaches to concert jazz. These changes reveal a crucial link between the commercial explosion of jazz and the institutionalization of U.S. modernism after the war.

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I arrived at the University of Virginia in the fall of 2009. I had just completed an M.A. in Musicology and Women's Studies at the University of Georgia. I planned to study Icelandic popular music. During the process of doing some local fieldwork with the composition program at UVa, I discovered the brilliance of post-tonal music—a sound I once responded to with the question, “What is this shit?” My hillbilly ears were not accustomed, but leaving rural Georgia had already challenged everything I knew to be normal, so why not my aesthetic preferences. Increasingly fascinated with dissonance, metric ambiguity, and unconventional timbres, forms, and textures, I started studying U.S. modernism. The rest is history. But it took a village.

First, I must thank three very important women academics who have been mentors and sometimes surrogate mothers. Susan Thomas, my master's thesis advisor, believed in my intellectual capacities in a way that no one ever had. She inspired me to work on issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality and to get a degree in Women's Studies. Bonnie Gordon has been an invaluable mentor and friend over the last several years of my graduate career. Thanks to her, my writing is spunkier, my feminism more hardcore, and my commitment to justice unbound. Dorothe Bach, my mentor at the Center for Teaching Excellence, had an incredible ability to make me want to be my best self. Her commitment to transformative teaching is a light flickering in the darkness that is sometimes academia. These three women made it possible to do the thing against all odds. I only hope I can be the same source of inspiration and support to other young women academics.

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was always complimented with a discussion of my strengths. He never offered lackluster advice. Not once. Every meeting had a come-to-jesus conversation about how to dramatically improve my scholarship. He was always enthusiastic about finding ways to bring out my best, even when it required a long and exhausting discussion. I am truly honored to be one of his students, and I look forward to our ongoing interactions in the field.

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My graduate student career was full of unexpected surprises and difficulties. In 2011, I lost my mother and my only two surviving grandparents in a six-month period. In 2016, I left my husband of ten years. These traumatic life events were amplified by the trauma of being a graduate student at the University of Virginia whose hostility towards women, people of color, and members of the LGBT community was inescapable. In the 2015–2016 academic year, Hannah Graham was murdered, *Rolling Stone* published “A Rape on Campus,” which

incited infuriating arguments dismissing rape culture, and one of my former black students, Martese Johnson, was brutally assaulted by ABC police on our University corner. President Teresa Sullivan was ousted during my comprehensive exams in 2012, and Donald Trump became president-elect a week before I submitted my dissertation to my committee.

I could not have survived these unstable times without several important communities of women. The first being the musgrad colleagues that have become my lifeline at conferences. These include Vilde Aaslid, Emily Gale, Shana Goldin-Perschbacher, Liz Lindau, Alli Robbins, and Mary Simonson. I hope the pajama parties in our adjoining hotel rooms become a mainstay of our conferencing adventures. Your brilliant research has sent a message to the musicological community: UVa musgrads mean business.

These women replaced my old conference buddy, Carrie Allen Tipton, who now thrives as a writer and music scholar outside of academia. Carrie was my mentor and friend while I studied at UGA. Even though we live in separate states, our phone conversations sustain me. I am thankful for our shared love for dark humor and our deep bond.

Three groups of women living in Charlottesville, Va. gave me courage and strength. They helped me cope with my mother's death and my divorce so I could press forward. This support materialized in the form of group texts that provided endless laughter. These are: **Vagina Polywogs** (Sarah Carr, Claibourne Reppert, Jahnavi Wraight, Alicia Walsh-Noel), **Mulabhandas** (Sarah Carr and Ellen Connell), and **EDGE Push-up Queens** (Emily Baxter, Candace Grierson, Leti Hansen, Dana Lewis, Brooke McGowan, Candice Rush, and Jeanie Wolf). Ellen, watching you move to New York without a job and train for a marathon at the same time was a constant source of inspiration. Jahnavi, you are the most woke person I know and the most loving. The support of the Wraights has kept me strong.



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Lastly, my two boxers, Copeland and Vera, have shown me what no human can offer: unconditional love. They do not know it but this love gave me the courage I needed to take life's less easy route—a route which ensured I surrounded myself with caring, honest, and loving people and offered the same to friends and family. Copeland put on some weight and Vera had a significant reduction in time playing with her ball. I appreciate the sacrifices they made so mommy could finish her degree. Their wiggle butts and warm cuddles accompanied every last revision of this document (Figure A.1).

Figure A.1. Copeland and Vera Doktor (2013)



## Introducing “the Jazz Problem”

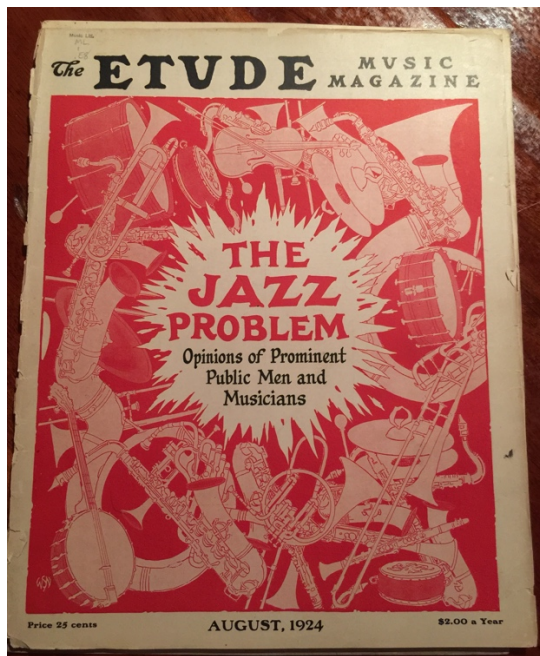
The August 1924 issue of *The Etude* was dedicated to “The Jazz Problem.” Centered on the bright red cover, these three words were enclosed by a round frame with dagger-like edges (Figure I.1). A circle of symphonic instruments, chaotically layered on top of one another, bordered the cover. The first page informed the reader “Where the Etude Stands on Jazz.” They “do most emphatically *not endorse* Jazz,” but instead discuss “Jazzmania” for its “wideawake readers,” who might want to “keep informed upon all sides of leading musical questions.”<sup>1</sup> In case the reader bypassed this section, a reminder appeared several pages in: “Please don’t imagine that The Etude has gone ‘Jazz-Mad.’ We are merely discussing the problem because it has become a vital question all over the world.”<sup>2</sup> The periodical comprises short essays written by “prominent public men and musicians.” They are peppered with promotions for instruction in jazz alongside other musical styles, mostly classical. A full-page ad for Buescher Saxophones adorns the back cover. It features a large picture of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

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<sup>1</sup> “Where the Etude Stands on Jazz,” *The Etude*, vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 515, emphasis supplied.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

Figure I.1. Cover of “The Jazz Problem” Issue of *The Etude* (1924)



To ignite discussion, the editor sent the question “Where is Jazz Leading America?” to “several famous men and women in and out of music” who answered with short essays. These included composers Felix Borowski, Arthur Foote, Henry F. Gilbert, and John Alden Carpenter as well as bandleaders Vincent Lopez and Paul Whiteman. Composer Amy Beach, the only woman present in this collection of voices, wrote that jazz’s association with “modern dancing” and “the sentiment of [its] verses” make it “difficult to find a combination more vulgar or debasing.” Conductor Walter Damrosch lambasted jazz for being what a caricature is to the portrait: “The caricature may be clever, but it aims at distortion of line and feature in order to make its point; similarly, jazz may be clever but its effects are made by exaggeration, distortion and vulgarisms.” Violinist Franz Drdla, however, declared that “Jazz is the characteristic folk music of modernity,” because “America is the most modern country of the world.” Composer Charles Wakefield Cadman proclaimed, “Its very rhythms and its fantastic effects reflect the restless energy that pulses through the ‘spirit of the day,’ a restlessness that

has become most patent since the World War.” John Philip Sousa and Vincent Lopez distinguished between different types of jazz: some good, orchestrated, and refined; others vulgar, primitive, and noisy.<sup>3</sup>

The featured essay was written by “The Millionaire Emperor of Super-Jazz,” Paul Whiteman, who was coming off the heels of his much-talked-about February concert, *An Experiment in Modern Music*.<sup>4</sup> At the concert, Whiteman sought to educate his audience on the “true form of jazz” with songs such as “Livery Stable Blues,” featured on the first commercial recording of jazz. He also showed listeners the difference between “legitimate scoring” and “jazzing,” and George Gershwin infamously premiered his *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924).<sup>5</sup> In addition to this concert, Whiteman was enjoying unprecedented success as a recording artist. This success coincided with a major boom in the recording industry.<sup>6</sup> His first hit, “Whispering” (1921), was a No.1 hit for 11 weeks and on the charts for 9 more weeks, and by 1923, Whiteman had become the best-selling artist on Victor by selling over 2 million copies of the song.<sup>7</sup> In *The Etude*, he answered the question of his essay title, “What is Jazz

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<sup>3</sup> All quotes in this paragraph come from Ibid., 517—520.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 313—360; Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71—83; Don Rayno, *Paul Whiteman: Pioneer in American Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 79—121; John Howland, *Ellington Uptown: Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, & the Birth of Concert Jazz* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 1—5.

<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to summarize the wealth of scholarship on George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* and Paul Whiteman’s *An Experiment in Modern Music* concert. To scratch the surface of this well-covered composition and premiere, see: Carol Oja, “Gershwin and American Modernists of the 1920s,” *Musical Quarterly* 78:4 (Winter 1994): 646—668; David Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Don Rayno, *Paul Whiteman: Pioneer in American Music, Volume 1, 1890—1950* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003); Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Larry Starr, *George Gershwin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); and Ryan Paul Bañagale, *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the eruption of jazz and mass entertainment during the 1920s in the United States, see: Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America & the Meaning of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Burton Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Wald, 71—96.

<sup>7</sup> Wald, 77.

Doing to American Music?" He concluded that it was altering the nature of orchestras and predicted that "the leading composers of the world will be influenced by jazz."<sup>8</sup> Though it comes from the "wild din" of the "old-fashioned minstrel show" when performers "'jazzboed' the tune," jazz was "commanding the attention of serious musicians everywhere."<sup>9</sup>

"The Jazz Problem" exceeded the confines of the *The Etude's* readership. Jazz was construed as a "problem," for some listeners, because, by the early 1920s, jazz had permeated American culture. So much so that the age was defined by it. The Jazz Age produced both the rapid growth of mass entertainment and the spread of black working-class culture.<sup>10</sup> For some—especially those in the industry—this was exciting; for others, it was a threat to white control over American culture. Kathy Ogren, in *The Jazz Revolution*, writes "by the 1920s, jazz—the most distinctive form of modern black music—was influential enough to pose an unmistakable challenge to white cultural domination."<sup>11</sup> Anti-jazz fraternities materialized, women's clubs boycotted jazz, and students even protested its circulation.<sup>12</sup> In an oft-quoted 1921 essay in *Ladies Home Journal*, Anne Shaw Faulkner asked "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" and concluded that "jazz is an influence of evil."<sup>13</sup> The policing of black music relied on virulently racist terms, describing black Americans as savages and their music as noisy. "Jazz," Rev. Dr. A. W. Beaven of Rochester told his readers, "may be analyzed as a

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Whiteman, "What is Jazz Doing to American Music?" *The Etude*, vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 524.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 523.

<sup>10</sup> There is a wealth of writing and research on the Jazz Age, but the following accounts are attuned to art and culture: Geoffrey Perrett, *American in the Twenties: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996); Robert Crunden, *Body & Soul: The Making of American Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Ogren, 11. For more on conversations about jazz in art music, see: Paul Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46–95.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Koenig, ed., *Jazz in Print (1856–1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 171, 214, 227, 235, 238.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Shaw Faulkner, "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1921, included in Koenig, 152.

combination of nervousness, lawlessness, primitive and savage animalism and lasciviousness.”<sup>14</sup>

Jazz was also construed as a “problem,” because it signaled a shift in who was controlling representations of black culture. Unlike the nineteenth century era of minstrelsy, black music in the twentieth-century concert hall and marketplace was increasingly performed and circulated by black Americans. Two prominent examples include the success of the race record Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” in 1920, which sold 75,000 copies within the first few weeks, and Noble Sissle’s and Eubie Blake’s all-black Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* in 1921.<sup>15</sup> Together, they opened the doors of the recording studio and the stage to African American performers at an extraordinary rate. As jazz proliferated and black performers increasingly had a say in its commercial production, jazz became a threat to white supremacy as well as a powerful tool for black advancement.<sup>16</sup> Musicologist Ronald Radano astutely points out that “the Jazz Problem” had “a metonymic relation that conflated an insidious music with an enduring social condition, commonly characterized as ‘the Negro problem.’”<sup>17</sup> Terms like “jazzmania” and “jazzmad” suggested it was a disease that could be contracted and needed to be contained.<sup>18</sup> Jazz was frequently referred to as an epidemic.<sup>19</sup> “The Jazz Problem,” then, can also be understood as an attempt by Americans to control the blackening of American culture.

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<sup>14</sup> “Primitive Savage Animalism, Preacher’s Analysis of Jazz,” *The New York Times*, 3 March 1922, included in Koenig, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 192 and 200.

<sup>16</sup> Radano, 234.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 236.

<sup>18</sup> George Miller, “Song Echoes from the Old South,” *The Musical Courier*, 6 April 1922, in Koenig, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Koenig, 135, 176, 328, 355, and 389.

For composers, “the Jazz Problem” was more nuanced and multifaceted. Jazz had developed a reputation for being distinctly American and particularly modern in the early 1920s. It therefore became central to discussions about U.S. concert music. “Jazz,” declared conductor Leopold Stokowski that year, “is an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic, super-active times in which we are living, and it is useless to fight against it. Already its vigor, its new vitality, is beginning to manifest itself.”<sup>20</sup> Many U.S. composers felt as though they lacked a distinct concert tradition, and they were often ridiculed by critics for being derivative of Europe or lacking a cohesive, national style.<sup>21</sup> Jazz offered a compositional ingredient—unique, native, and modern—that could be used to carve out a distinction from European music. Yet, the music’s associations with vulgar dancing, sexual promiscuity, mass entertainment, and working-class black culture made it controversial. It is this conflict that fueled “the Jazz Problem” among composers: that jazz was modern but also commercial, that it was black popular music but also uniquely American.

Many U.S. composers confronted this dilemma. They tried to determine what the role of jazz would be in the concert hall by using it in their compositions. Collectively, they contributed to what became a vogue for symphonic jazz in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> John Alden

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<sup>20</sup> “Stokowski Declares in Favor of ‘Jazz,’” *Musical Observer*, 24 April 1924, included in Koenig, 302.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the development of American concert music and its perceived weakness, see: Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Mary Herron DuPree, “The Failure of American Music: The Critical View from the 1920s,” *The Journal of Musicology* 2:3 (Summer 1983): 305–315; Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–87; Barbara L. Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 68–126; Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> In this dissertation, I use the terms jazz-based, jazz-influenced, and jazz-inspired classical music interchangeably purely for variety of language. Symphonic jazz is a historically accurate term—that is, composers contributing to the tradition referred to it as such. I use it to refer to the body of jazz-based orchestral music with which composers were explicitly engaged. Concert jazz is a more contemporary term used to refer to a variety of ensembles using jazz in a high art context across the twentieth century. I sometimes use this term to broaden the scope of the repertoire I discuss, because “symphonic jazz” limits the tradition of using jazz in classical music to orchestral works. While my research, indeed, favors discussions of the symphonic jazz vogue, I also analyze music that extends its boundaries—for example, vocal and solo piano music.

Carpenter's 1921 *Krazy Kat: A Jazz Pantomime* was the first to use the word in the title of a composition.<sup>23</sup> It was based on George Herriman's wildly popular comic strip *Krazy Kat* about the tumultuous relationship between a carefree cat named Krazy and a moody mouse named Ignatz. The ballet—replete with costumes by French experimental filmmaker Fernand Léger—premiered at New York's Town Hall in January of 1922. Like a lot of concert jazz, *Krazy Kat* received mixed reviews. Some critics censured Carpenter for his use of jazz—"too polished," "insincere"—while others praised the ballet for its distinctive American quality.<sup>24</sup> Despite criticism, it was used in the Greenwich Village Follies that year and received a few other U.S. performances in the 1920s. Thereafter, George Gershwin's 1924 *Rhapsody in Blue*, Aaron Copland's 1925 *Music for Theater*, and James P. Johnson's 1928 *Yamekraw: A Negro Rhapsody* demonstrated composers' persistence in using jazz to define American concert music. These works were just the tip of the iceberg; performances of compositions by Louis Gruenberg, Leo Sowerby, and Rubin Goldmark helped to create what I call the *Symphonic Jazz Era*. "The Jazz Problem," then, for these composers was not about *if* jazz belonged in the concert hall but *how*.

Symphonic jazz comprised a variety of musical formulas that illuminated the relationship between jazz and modernism, especially as these works articulated ideas about race and class. John Howland, in his study of African American composers of concert jazz from the 1920s to the 1940s, writes: "In its ambition to marry classical prestige, lush symphonic-style textures, jazz orchestration, and contemporary popular music, symphonic jazz was intimately tied to American preoccupations with class and race."<sup>25</sup> Howland shows

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<sup>23</sup> Howard Pollack, *John Alden Carpenter: A Chicago Composer* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 195.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Howland, *Ellington Uptown*, 3.



how James P. Johnson and Duke Ellington combined black entertainment arranging techniques with classical music composition in their extended jazz works. His study of Johnson and Ellington also challenges the association of symphonic jazz with only white bandleaders and composers.

This dissertation analyzes the musical formulas of jazz-based compositions which, through specific compositional strategies, worked out modernism's relationship to race and class via jazz. I expand the scope of Howland's study by considering black and white composers in a single study, because they were equally concerned about building a distinct American concert music tradition. As my case studies demonstrate, they both contributed to discourses about American modernism, even conversing and collaborating with one another to do so. I also confine my study to a shorter time period, from 1917 to 1925, to track the development of this music at the precise moment jazz was burgeoning in both the commercial and art music worlds. I analyze several jazz-based compositions by four composers: Edmund Jenkins, John Powell, William Grant Still, and George Antheil. Using each composition's reception history and the composers' writings about jazz, I show how these composers used sounds—marked by race and class—to articulate their own understanding of American modernism in the 1920s.

I use "the Jazz Problem" as an analytic to drive my historical narrative and analysis, because this discursive formation determined compositional choices. "The Jazz Problem," as I employ it, encompasses a set of discourses that shaped exactly how composers manipulated and played with sounds that signified jazz and those that signified classical music. These four composers brought jazz into the concert hall at a time when jazz and classical music were often understood as antithetical. Despite, and sometimes because of, perceived differences, composers joined the two modes of musicking. A constellation of tensions about what

constituted jazz and how to integrate it into modernist art shaped this compositional problematic. I examine these four composers' "response to 'the Jazz Problem'" to demonstrate how they balanced the controversy of jazz representing blackness and commercialism with jazz's ability to be a symbol of both America and modernism. Entangled in this problematic was the elusive definition of jazz itself and how it exceeded the confines of a 1920s performance practice.

What constituted jazz musically was debated. Many described jazz as a method of playing in which any musical material could be "jazzed." Critic Henry Osgood wrote "there is practically no tune in the world which refuses to be jazzed."<sup>26</sup> Where ragtime provoked the idea that any melody could be "ragged," so too did jazz: "While society once 'ragged,' they now 'jazz,'" wrote one *Literary Digest* writer in 1919.<sup>27</sup> Jazz was often interpreted on primarily rhythmic terms, exemplified by Virgil Thomson in 1924: "Jazz, in brief, is a compound of (a) the fox-trot rhythm (a four measure, *alla breve*, with a double accent), and (b) a syncopated melody over this rhythm."<sup>28</sup> If rhythm was the first way listeners described jazz, improvisation was the second. Whiteman believed it came from old minstrel shows when performers "jazzboed" the tune.<sup>29</sup> Internationally renowned band leader James Reese Europe expanded this myopic focus on improvisation and rhythm by discussing instrumental effects, among other things: "With the brass instruments we put in mutes and make a whirling motion with the tongue, at the same time blowing full pressure. With wind instruments we pinch the mouthpiece and blow hard."<sup>30</sup> Discussions of jazz timbres frequently appeared. Music critic

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<sup>26</sup> Henry O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), 20.

<sup>27</sup> "A Negro [James Reese Europe] Explains 'Jazz,'" *Literary Digest*, 16 April 1919, included in Koenig, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Virgil Thomson, "Jazz," *American Mercury* (August 1924): 465.

<sup>29</sup> Whiteman, 523.

<sup>30</sup> "A Negro [James Reese Europe] Explains 'Jazz,'" *Literary Digest*, 16 April 1919, included in Koenig, 132.

W. J. Henderson wrote that “jazz, strictly speaking, is instrumental effects, the principal one being the grotesque treatment of the portamento, especially in the wind instruments.”<sup>31</sup>

However, symphonic jazz composers were grappling with more than just the musical specifics of jazz; they were grappling with a cultural imaginary. This web of ideas exceeded the music and reflected racial and class tensions in America. A 1917 New Orleans *Times-Picayune* article:

To uncertain natures, wild sound and meaningless noise have an exciting, almost intoxicating effect, like crude colors and strong perfume, the sight of flesh or the sadistic pleasure in blood. To such as these, the jass is a delight. A dance to the unstable bray of the sackbut is a sensual delight more intense and quite different from the languor of a Viennese waltz or the refined sentiment and respectful emotion of the eighteenth century minuet.<sup>32</sup>

These three sentences shed an abundance of light on the jazz imaginary. For some listeners, jazz represented African primitivity, black “noise,”<sup>33</sup> or “jungle music.”<sup>34</sup> It incited sexual arousal and was intoxicating: “The group that play for dancing, when colored, seem infected with the virus that they try to instil as a stimulus in others.”<sup>35</sup> Jazzmania, as some called it.<sup>36</sup> Jazz was frequently compared to ideas and objects, which represented a sense of change (progress or regress, depending on the author) in the United States. No one captured this better than music critic R. W. S. Mendl, who connected the emergence of jazz to everything from women’s short haircuts to Bolshevism:

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<sup>31</sup> W. J. Henderson, “Ragtime, Jazz, and High Art,” *Scribner’s Magazine* (February 1925): 202, quoted in Berlin, 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, 17 June 1917, included in David Metzger, ed., *Reading Jazz* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993), 52–53.

<sup>33</sup> Osgood, 6; Koenig, 75, 134–136, 145, 194, 241, 243, 244, 257, 278, 285, 315, 319, 326, 358, 408, 419, 442, 467, 484, 505, 524, and 536.

<sup>34</sup> Helen Bullitt Lowry, “Putting the Music into the Jazz,” *The New York Times Book Review & Magazine*, 29 December 1922, included in Koenig, 216.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Kingsley, “The Appeal of Primitive Jazz,” reprinted in *Literary Digest*, 25 August 1917, quoted in Osgood, 10–11.

<sup>36</sup> Koenig, xvi; and “Where the Etude Stands on Jazz,” 520.

Jazz is the product of a restless age: an age in which the fever of war is only now beginning to abate its fury; when men and women, after their efforts in the great struggle, are still too much disturbed to be content with a tranquil existence; when freaks and stunts and sensations are the order—or disorder—of the day; when painters delight in portraying that which is not, and sculptors twisting the human limbs into strange, fantastic shapes; when America is turning out her merchandise in an unprecedented speed and motor cars are racing along the roads; when aeroplanes are beating successive records and ladies are in so great a hurry that they wear short skirts which enable them to move faster and cut off their hair to save a few precious moments of the day; when the extremes of Bolshevism and Fascismo are pursuing their own ways simultaneously, and the whole world is rushing helter-skelter in unknown directions.<sup>37</sup>

Jazz came to stand in for cultural and social change in the United States. Jazz was a harbinger of post-war industrialization and transformations of the social order governing constructions of race, gender, and class. Thus, when composers used jazz, they were not just drawing on distinct components of a genre but also a cultural construct of immense proportions.

Jazz-based compositions by Antheil, Still, Powell, and Jenkins contribute to the formation of this jazz imaginary especially as it refracted ideas about American modernism. Their compositions demonstrate a unique take on a series of mutually-constituted dichotomies which structured U.S. modernist art. Composers defined modernism and jazz in sometimes very contradictory ways, but they often did so through a discursive language that contrasted representations of highbrow with lowbrow, blackness with whiteness, and the past with the present. These were not the only discursive formations at play but they were the most prominent. They gave meaning and form to concert jazz.

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<sup>37</sup> R. W. S. Mendl, *The Appeal of Jazz* (London: Philip Allan & Co., 1927), 186—187.

## The Dialectics of Modernism

Modernism was a contested term.<sup>38</sup> Two frequently cited quotes capture its polysemic nature and its symbolic potency. Virginia Woolf in a 1924 essay wrote, “On or about December 1910, human character changed.”<sup>39</sup> Ezra Pound in 1934 charged fellow artists to “Make it New!”<sup>40</sup> These provocative statements reflect two common ways of understanding modernism: 1) Western society underwent radical transformations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century spurred by rapid industrialization and culminating in a horrific world war; 2) to articulate the effects of this transformation, artists rejected Victorian social norms and Enlightenment thought and located alternative modes of representation.<sup>41</sup> Writings by Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud caused readers to question fundamental aspects of human experience in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The First World War facilitated unparalleled shifts in imperial relations, modes of production, and conceptions of nationalism.<sup>43</sup> Emblematic modernist works such as French symbolist poet Stephane

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<sup>38</sup> One noteworthy article that brings the different and sometimes contradictory definitions of modernism into a single piece of scholarship is: Susan Stanford Friedman, “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September 2001): 500. For other scholarship on the contested terrain of modernism, see: Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982); Daniel Albright, *Putting Modernism Together: Literature, Music, and Painting, 1872-1927* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” [1924] in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, edited by Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 395–397.

<sup>40</sup> Ezra Pound, *Make It New! Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

<sup>41</sup> For more on this definition of modernism, see: Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*; Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” in *Modernist Culture in America* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991); Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Pericles Lewis, ed., *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008); Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Excerpts of writings by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are included in Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, eds., *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Also see: Robert Morgan, “Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism,” *Critical Inquiry* 10:3 (March 1984): 442–461.

<sup>43</sup> Though most scholarly studies of modernism consider the impact of the First World War, the following hone in on the war’s effects on the aesthetics of specific modernist movements: Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston,

Mallarmé's *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1876), Norwegian expressionist Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), and Russian composer Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1914) challenged pre-existing models of poetry, painting, and ballet. Mallarmé blurred the lines between reality and fantasy, sound and symbol. Munch captured the psychological effects of modernization, which really resonated with viewers after WWI. Stravinsky turned the orchestra into one big "primitive" drum, shocking audiences to the point of revolt. These works, according to modernist scholar Susan Stanford Friedman, can be thought of as the "the expressive dimension of modernity," with modernization being "the velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of social institutions."<sup>44</sup>

Artistic representations of modernity were diverse, and they often congealed into oppositional movements. Daniel Albright argues that modernism was fundamentally about "testing the limits of aesthetic construction" and, therefore, it gave birth to extreme modes of expression, sitting at opposite ends of a spectrum: "volatility of emotion (Expressionism), stability and inexpressiveness (the New Objectivity), accuracy of representation (Hyperrealism), absence of representation (Abstractionism), purity of form (Neoclassicism), formless energy (Neobarbarism), cultivation of the technological present (Futurism), cultivation of the prehistoric past (the Mythic Method)."<sup>45</sup> Despite their apparent discord, there were surprising connections between these movements. For example, Filippo Marinetti's 1909 "Manifesto of Futurism" used what he understood to be the transgressive

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eds., *Modernism, Inc.: Body, Memory, Capital* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Walter Kalaïdjian, *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Seth Moglen, *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Friedman, 443.

<sup>45</sup> Albright, *Putting Modernism Together*, 5.

potential of the “primitive” colonial subject to promote revolutionary change.<sup>46</sup> In the manifesto, the “atavistic ennui,” trampled into “rich oriental rugs,” propels his revolt against contemporary life.<sup>47</sup> The language of primitivism, therefore, voiced the political ambition of futurism. Modernist movements understood to be antithetical could be quite intertwined.

The same can be said about modernist art and popular culture. Thought to be diametrically opposed, the two betray a more interdependent relationship. Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide* contends that “modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture.”<sup>48</sup> Writing about the avant-garde specifically, Huyssen uses a gender analytic to reveal how popular entertainment was positioned as a *feminized* Other. To uphold the integrity, the rebellious affect, and the virility of modernism, mass entertainment was to be avoided at all costs. No other writing captured this modernist anxiety more than Clement Greenberg’s 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.” For Greenberg, modernism fomented as a reaction against consumer-driven culture. It was the antidote to the dumbing-down of culture by commercial entertainment.<sup>49</sup> However, scholars such as Allison Pease argue that modernism and mass culture were conjoined. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*, Pease locates a striking resemblance between the shock tactics of avant-garde

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<sup>46</sup> For a compelling account on how the metaphysics of race permeated modernist manifestos, including the work of Marinetti, see: Laura Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909,” in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, 249.

<sup>48</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii.

<sup>49</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6:5 (1939): 34–49.

writers such as James Joyce and Ezra Pound and popular pornography advertisements.<sup>50</sup>

Joyce and Pound, she argues, were indebted to mass literature.

U.S. modernisms had a less adversarial relationship to mass entertainment, as the United States was home to many technological developments.<sup>51</sup> Scholars such as Miriam Hansen show how people in the U.S. had a broader understanding of modernism—one which enveloped popular culture instead of seeing it as antithetical. Modernism is not simply “a repertory of artistic styles” or “set of ideas pursued by groups of artists and intellectuals,” she argues. Modernism

encompasses a whole range of cultural and artistic practices that register, respond to, and reflect upon processes of modernization and the experience of modernity, including a paradigmatic transformation of the conditions under which art is produced, transmitted, and consumed.<sup>52</sup>

The global circulation of early cinema (or classic Hollywood cinema) produced, what Hansen identifies as, a “new sensorium,” which “opened up hitherto unperceived modes of sensory perception and experience...to suggest a different organization of the daily world.”<sup>53</sup>

Even though popular culture saturated U.S. modernist art, literature, and music, it was still contentious. As I demonstrate below, the anxiety that Huyssen identifies in various German texts was very much present in U.S. modernisms. Jazz, more than any other popular music genre preceding it, amplified this controversy because of its black cultural origins. This controversy was central to what I have thus far called “the Jazz Problem.” Composers grappled with this controversy primarily through three dichotomies which distinguished

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<sup>50</sup> Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> For more on this topic, see: William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); and T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> Miriam Bratu Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity* 6:2 (April 1999): 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 71—72.



representations of highbrow from lowbrow, blackness from whiteness, and the past from the present. As I discuss below, composers used these languages in their jazz-based compositions and, as a result, delineated modernism's indebtedness to representations of blackness.

### *Highbrow vs. Lowbrow*

One way composers defined modernism was through the distinction between “high” and “low” cultural forms.<sup>54</sup> These classed terms linked wealth to what was understood to be a refinement of taste. These terms referred not only to music but also to the listeners themselves. The “highbrow” was intellectually superior to the “lowbrow” and had a more sophisticated understanding of art.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes people mocked the “highbrow” for being snobbish.<sup>56</sup> As Huyssen demonstrates, compositions were labeled modernist because they were of a more serious caliber (e.g. marked by their conceptual approach or thematic development) but also because they were *not* popular music. To signify difference from commercial jazz, composers talked about jazz-based classical music using this same distinction. Terms like “jazz classique”<sup>57</sup> and “highbrow jazz”<sup>58</sup> appeared regularly in the 1920s and eventually became synonymous with symphonic jazz. Conversely, low cultural products such as jazz were incorporated into avant-garde compositions deliberately to either parody the pretensions of the highbrow or shock concert hall audiences. Symphonic jazz composers engaged with the high/low divide in a myriad of ways but these compositions and their reception confirm what

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<sup>54</sup> For more on this topic, see: Huyssen, 1–62; and Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 367–407.

<sup>55</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 221.

<sup>56</sup> Koenig, 98.

<sup>57</sup> “A Tribute to Paul Whiteman,” *Talking Machine Journal*, November 1920, 66, quoted in Wald, 74.

<sup>58</sup> Virgil Thomson, “The Cult of Jazz,” *Vanity Fair* (June 1925): 118, quoted in Oja, 318.

Huyssen qualifies as the “volatile relationship between high art and mass culture” that characterized the culture of modernity.<sup>59</sup>

Distinctions between cultivated art and mass entertainment were ensconced in U.S. cultural expressions by 1924, but this was not always so. Lawrence Levine, in his landmark study *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, says terms such as “popular,” “folk,” “high,” and “low” did not exist prior to the late nineteenth century. Performers and artists regularly mixed different forms of art and entertainment. William Shakespeare was subject to burlesque parodies, and Giuseppe Verdi featured in café orchestras. The theater was home to both opera and minstrelsy. Popular culture included the fine arts. But by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an increasingly rigid distinction between “high” and “low” culture formed. “Arbiters of culture” implemented a hierarchy to either “proselytize among the people” or create “an oasis of refuge from and a barrier against them.”<sup>60</sup>

Because composers combined jazz and classical music, the concert jazz vogue could be said to challenge the high-low divide that Levine argues was fully formed by the 1920s. Musicologist Carol Oja, in *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, says so in her chapter on Paul Whiteman, William Grant Still, and Aaron Copland, among others. Taken together, their jazz-based compositions coalesced into what she calls “the crossover movement,” which challenged the “well established divisions between ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ art.”<sup>61</sup> John Howland, however, argues that concert jazz did not challenge the divide so much as it existed within it. For Howland, the “truly hybrid compositional tradition” enacted by James P.

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<sup>59</sup> Huyssen, vii.

<sup>60</sup> Levine, 192 and 207.

<sup>61</sup> Oja, 315.

Johnson and Duke Ellington emerged from “long-standing traditions of cross-fertilization and cultural hybridization in all strata of American musical life.”<sup>62</sup> This music provoked what Howland calls “anti-middlebrow criticism” by those who sought to uphold the cultural order the high/low dichotomy purportedly provided. Johnson and Ellington, along with many other black musicians, created “glorified” entertainment—a middlebrow form that was crucial to black cultural advancement.<sup>63</sup>

My case studies show that jazz-inspired classical music did not challenge the high/low divide; it simply asked listeners to modify their application of it—to use the terms differently (i.e., highbrow jazz and jazz classique), not abandon them altogether. For example, as Oja notes, Gilbert Seldes advocated the serious study of jazz in his 1924 book *The Seven Lively Arts*. However, Seldes still distinguished between a good and bad type of jazz, and he mostly wrote about Paul Whiteman, Zez Confrey, and Darius Milhaud with a smidge of Irving Berlin and George Gershwin. “Jazz is good,” he wrote, “at least good jazz is good.”<sup>64</sup> Likewise, musicologist Carl Engel went so far as to compare “good jazz” to the seventeenth-century dance, the Sarabande: scandalous in its time but now classical. “Good jazz,” he concludes “is enjoyed by capital musicians, by men who are neither inordinately immoral nor extravagantly uncultured.”<sup>65</sup> He proceeds to list the number of composers—Stravinsky, Satie, Debussy, and Ravel—who have used it in their works “of the purest art.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, there was still a dichotomy—or in some instances, a continuum—and it was used in service of defining and defending one’s taste.

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<sup>62</sup> Howland, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 104–110.

<sup>64</sup> Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924), 84.

<sup>65</sup> Carl Engel, “Jazz: A Musical Discussion,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1922, included in Koenig, 201.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The high/low divide was used to carve out racialized and classed distinctions. Levine links the emergence of the terms “highbrow” and “lowbrow” to growing cultural anxiety about the changing racial composition of the because of immigration and the First Great Migration.<sup>67</sup> In fact, as Levine notes, the words “highbrowed” and “lowbrowed” were phrenological terms used by social Darwinists to create pseudo-scientific racial taxonomies based on the physical features of the skull.<sup>68</sup> Just as racialists used these terms to create a hierarchy that privileged whiteness so too did “arbiters of culture” but to create a hierarchy which privileged refined art. These two hierarchies constituted one another in the Jazz Age. According to Levine, culture became a political site where hierarchies of race and class were reinforced and contested.

Especially after the debut of George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, it became common to distinguish between different types of jazz, and this move was fundamentally about disavowing working-class blackness. The second feature article in “the Jazz Problem” issue of *The Etude* is even called “Jazz — Lowbrow and Highbrow.” It was written by retired critic of the New York *Evening Post* Henry T. Finck. He used racial descriptions in his bisection. “Lowbrow jazz” is African and made up of “wild, barbaric, lawless sounds.”<sup>69</sup> “Highbrow jazz” was perfected in the Percy Grainger’s compositions, and it featured “limitless vistas of novel sound effects.”<sup>70</sup> In this same issue, writer George Ade said “the cruder form of ‘jazz’” was “a collection of squeals and squawks and wails,” but “good syncopation is legitimate.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Levine, 171 — 242. Also see: Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Levine, 222.

<sup>69</sup> Henry T. Finck, “Jazz — Lowbrow and Highbrow,” *The Etude*, vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 527.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 528.

<sup>71</sup> Finck, 527; “Where Is Jazz Leading America? Responses of Famous Men and Women in and out of Music: George Ade,” *The Etude*, vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 517.

He mapped “certain kinds of jazz” onto the U.S. class hierarchy: “It can be a dreadful disturbance to the atmosphere when perpetrated by a cluster of small-town blacksmiths and sheet metal workers but it becomes inspiring and almost uplifting under the magical treatment of Paul Whiteman and some of his confreres.”<sup>72</sup>

White Americans were not alone in this distinction; many middle- and upper-class black Americans distanced themselves from working-class black culture, too. For example, Dave Peyton, music writer for the *Chicago Defender*, was highly critical of jazz in the mid-1920s but by the late 1920s, he used the language of the high/low divide to praise certain kinds.<sup>73</sup> In a 1926 column on varieties of dance music Peyton called jazz “crude, barbaric, vulgar, suggestive” and said it was appealing only to “the animal emotions of the dancers who are susceptible to its charms.”<sup>74</sup> In a 1928 column on the origins of jazz he argued that the “crude style of jazz” had finally developed into “artistic jazz music”: “The beautiful melodies garnished with difficult eccentric figures and propelled by artful rhythms, hold grip on the world today, replacing the mushy, discordant jazz music.”<sup>75</sup> As I explain in greater detail in the first chapter, there were many important reasons why some black Americans disavowed all jazz or particular strains of jazz in the Jim Crow Era. New Negro leader Alain Locke, for example, expressed ambivalence about black popular music, because he thought black musicians felt enormous pressure to enact minstrelsy-inspired stereotypes for white audiences.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ade, 517.

<sup>73</sup> Ogren, 50–51; and Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 33–35.

<sup>74</sup> Dave Peyton, “The Musical Bunch,” *Chicago Defender*, 8 May 1926, quoted in Sarah A. Waits, “‘Listen to the Wild Discard’: Jazz in the Chicago Defender and the Louisiana Weekly, 1925–1929,” University of New Orleans Thesis, 2013, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Porter, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 163–166.

Differentiating between “certain kinds of jazz” enabled listeners to justify their tastes and composers to justify their compositions at a time when the use of black popular music was highly polemical. The high/low distinction made it possible for middle- and upper-class Americans to express an interest in jazz performed by white Americans while distancing themselves from black American music. It also enabled the black elite to distance themselves from working-class black culture. The high/low dichotomy betrayed how anxieties about class intersected those about race. Some composers exploited these anxieties by emphasizing jazz’s associations with working-class blackness. They did this to shake up the concert hall, to innovate concert music.

### *Black vs. White*

If modernism was partially defined by a tension between highbrow and lowbrow cultural forms, it was also defined through a racial dichotomy. On the one hand, modernism was often associated with white ingenuity. On the other hand, modernism was often conceived of through representations of black culture. These two sometimes worked in tandem with one another but not always. That is, some white composers used representations of blackness to appear cutting-edge, to appear more modernist. Take Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* as one example. If, as Daniel Albright says, modernist art “tends to be confrontational, in-your-face,” Picasso employed blackness to disturb something that was often constructed as white.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, articulating modernism through representations of blackness butted up against existing racial hierarchies and evolutionary narratives that placed black Americans “on the bottom rung of an immutable ladder to civilization,” according to as

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<sup>77</sup> Albright, *Putting Modernism Together*, 4.

cultural anthropologist Lee Baker.<sup>78</sup> How then could black culture signify modernity? This was a core tension for modernism. It revealed the extent to which the movement was intrinsically linked to racial representations that were born from a specific racial order.

The process of modernization in the United States was racial, and the aesthetic response to modernization replicated a similar attention to race. Scholars Paul Gilroy, Ronald Radano, and James Smethurst assert that the formation of the Jim Crow racial order in the 1890s profoundly impacted art.<sup>79</sup> Smethurst, in *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance*, even defines modernism as the comingling of “the establishment of Jim Crow as a national system” and “the response of African American artists and intellectuals...to this profound (and, for them, traumatic) ideological, political, economic, spatial, and cultural event.” Taken together, they “deeply marked American notions of modernity—and, ultimately, modernism—for both African Americans and white Americans (and Americans judged neither white or black).”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the systematic implementation of racial terror, exclusion, and violence indubitably shaped art in the United States.

If modernism is “the expressive dimension” of modernity, then this racial hierarchy afflicted the aesthetic languages of modernism. Toni Morrison, in her landmark 1992 text, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, argues the two were absolutely related. In her analysis of Willa Cather and Henry James, Morrison challenges scholars to consider how “racial ‘unconsciousness’ or awareness of race” impacted the interpretive

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<sup>78</sup> Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 35.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993); Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); and James Smethurst, *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Smethurst, 1.

languages of literary texts.<sup>81</sup> Her challenge is not just about analyzing the aftermath of Jim Crow laws but instead about fleshing out the immeasurable effects of notions of racial hierarchy, exclusion, vulnerability, disenfranchisement, and privilege on the structure of modernism itself—its aesthetics, its forms, its rules, its subconscious. Literary critic Michael North calls this the “dialect of modernism,” whereby “patterns of [modernist] rebellion through racial ventriloquism” run deep within twentieth century literature.<sup>82</sup> Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso, he argues, are able to “step away from conventional verisimilitude into abstracted” by and only by “a figurative change in race.”<sup>83</sup> Likewise, Pound scholar Michael Coyle argues that the poet’s “imaginative life” hinged on “African American figures and fantasies.”<sup>84</sup> Pound’s fascination with “miscegenation, sexual anarchy and political assassination” is one example of what Morrison labels an “Africanism” and Coyle describes as “a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American.”<sup>85</sup>

Representations of blackness were embedded in modernism and they were used by both black and white artists. Whereas Coyle and North focus on white appropriation of these signs and signifiers, Morrison and Radano consider how black artists also negotiated this same racialized aesthetic structure. “[F]or both black and white American writers, in a wholly racialized society,” Morrison exclaims, “there is no escape from racially inflected language.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3. Also see: Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>82</sup> Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Coyle, *Ezra Pound and African American Modernism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001), 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Morrison, 13.



About music, Radano trenchantly observes that racial figurations of black music “did not discriminate between black and white.”<sup>87</sup>

The modern versions of black musical difference were not, then, simply imposed onto African-Americans by a white power structure: As extensions of ideological formation, they affected everyone, including black musicians and audiences. What differed across the races was the nature of the responses to these performances and the conclusions reached about what they signified.<sup>88</sup>

Neither black nor white artists were immune to this language. In the 1920s, specifically, and in the wake of the commercial explosion of jazz, a white ultra-modern movement was flourishing at the exact same time the New Negro Renaissance took flight. These movements depended on one another. Black Americans did not just act as symbols for the appropriative objects of white art; they were active subjects in the construction of modernism’s “racially inflected language.”<sup>89</sup>

Jazz-based classical music is a flagrant expression of this “racially inflected language,” and, not surprisingly, its popularity took flight when the Jim Crow racial order was undergoing radical transformations following World War I. The first Great Migration challenged Jim Crow racial codes, designed to control black Americans, and black and white bodies co-mingled where they had not previously.<sup>90</sup> In addition, a major turning point in the black freedom movement occurred after black veterans returned home. The Harlem Hellfighters marched up New York’s Fifth Avenue to protest lynching, and race riots erupted

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<sup>87</sup> Radano, 237.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 271–272.

<sup>89</sup> Morrison, 13.

<sup>90</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Baldwin, Davarian L. *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

in dozens of cities.<sup>91</sup> The Second Ku Klux Klan had a surge in membership; in 1924, the number of reported members reached the millions.<sup>92</sup> If, as Susan Stanford Friedman says, modernity is “the velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of social institutions,” nothing embodies the radical nature of these “shattering changes” more than the calcification of Jim Crow segregation after the war.<sup>93</sup> Symphonic jazz, as the aesthetic response to these changes, confronted anxieties about *de jure* segregation. It brought together two seemingly oppositional modes of musicking, positioned as exclusively black and exclusively white, into a single listening experience. Through its sonic challenge to the color line, concert jazz showed the extent to which the Jim Crow racial order shaped U.S. musical modernism.

Symphonic jazz expressed the experience of modernity through representations of blackness. Lawrence Kramer, in “Powers of Blackness: Africanist Discourse in Modern Concert Music,” argues that the “high-low opposition” has a long history of racial encoding. To him, jazz-based compositions by Louis Gruenberg, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, and Claude Debussy are an extension of black-face minstrelsy and reflect the social inequality of the environment from which they emerged. Using Morrison’s term, “Africanisms,” Kramer shows how composers used “signs of blackness against which the subject of the dominant culture can seek to define itself as white.”<sup>94</sup> North, Coyle, and Kramer show how many white

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<sup>91</sup> Barbara Foley, *Specters of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); and J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 40–75.

<sup>92</sup> Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Roland G. Fryer and Steven D. Levitt, “Hatred and Profits: Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127:4 (2012): 1883–1925.

<sup>93</sup> Friedman, 443.

<sup>94</sup> Lawrence Kramer, “Power of Blackness: Africanist Discourse in Modern Concert Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16:1 (Spring 1996): 60. Also see: Maurice Peress, *Dvořák to Duke Ellington: A Conductor Explores America’s Music and its African American Roots* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

artists were utterly dependent on black signifiers for modernist cache. However, this one-sided study of white modernisms neglects the many black artists who engaged with representations of blackness, too. Symphonic jazz by black composers challenged conceptions of modernism as either music by white composers in the concert hall or commercial jazz by black musicians. Both black and white composers utilized representations of blackness. Their varied approaches to these depictions can be understood through the last modernist dichotomy—that of past versus present.

### *Past vs. Present*

Modernism was full of contradictions but none was as blatant as the fact that modernism represented the now, the new, and the latest trend, yet artists relentlessly turned to an imaginary anti-modern past to inspire innovation. Modernists wanted to signal a rupture from the past but they often relied on constructions of the past—or what Eric Hobsbawm has called “invented traditions”—to formulate new aesthetic conventions.<sup>95</sup> For example, Ezra Pound’s injunction, “Make it New” is a “product of historical recycling.” It comes from a story about Ch’eng T’ang, the first king of the Shang dynasty (1766–1753 BC), who purportedly had a washbasin with the saying inscribed on it.<sup>96</sup> This contradiction underpins 1920s concert jazz.

Jazz uniquely offered a way to negotiate this modernist dichotomy because it could be construed as either modern or primitive. On the one hand, jazz came to stand in for modernity in the 1920s. Jazz was “the spirit of the age” and “the spontaneous expression of the American

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<sup>95</sup> Nicholls, 173; and Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>96</sup> Michael North, “The Making of ‘Make It New,’” *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts & Politics*, August 15, 2013, <https://www.guernicamag.com/features/the-making-of-making-it-new/>, [accessed September 11, 2016].

spirit.”<sup>97</sup> Jazz was also described using what Joel Dinerstein calls “machine aesthetics”—the sound of the piston or the pulse of modern living.<sup>98</sup> Black critic J.A. Rogers wrote in *The New Negro*: “With its cowbells, auto horns, calliopes, rattles, dinner gongs, kitchen utensils, cymbals, screams, crashes, clankings and monotonous rhythm it bears all the marks of a nerve-strung, strident, mechanized civilization.”<sup>99</sup> Radano says jazz was “inextricably related to the creation of American modernism,” because of “its articulation of a radically new conception of racial otherness growing from the spatial dimensions of the crossroads as it intersects temporal affiliations north and south.”<sup>100</sup> Jazz represented the transition from South to North, from rural to urban, from folk expression to recorded popular song. Jazz was modern.

Jazz was also associated with so-called African primitivity. Comparisons to the syncopations of the “African jungle” or “African savage” are endless.<sup>101</sup> Even Rogers said it was “atavistically African...a thing of the jungles.”<sup>102</sup> Radano explains this comparison, arguing that by the 1920s rhythm had become the musical paradigm through which black music was understood. Rhythm became “the latest in the signatures of difference that served to distance and dislocate African-American otherness.”<sup>103</sup> This interpretation, when coupled with an emphasis on black musical ability as excessive or uncontrollable, made the language of primitivism more palatable, especially for advocates of white supremacy. “Americans became

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<sup>97</sup> Llewelyn C. Lloyd, “Jazz and the Modern Spirit,” *The Monthly Musical Record* (November 1926), included in Koenig, 490.

<sup>98</sup> Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>99</sup> J. A. Rogers, “Jazz At Home,” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1925), 218.

<sup>100</sup> Radano, 258.

<sup>101</sup> Lemke, 61—71.

<sup>102</sup> Rogers, 217—218.

<sup>103</sup> Radano, 236.

consumed with vivid fantasies of racialized sound,” Radano state, “that inspired enactments of simian-like ‘animal dances’ and celebrations of a ‘savage’ jazz animated by ‘jungle rhythms.’”<sup>104</sup> Jazz’s primitive associations were magnified by turn-of-the-century evolutionary narratives, which dominated ethnological studies about human progress as well as pseudo-scientific arguments in support of eugenics.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, many black Americans embraced jazz’s association with Africa to celebrate their cultural heritage or construct a diasporic connection to the continent.

Representations of blackness were crucial to articulating the past/present dichotomy, and jazz was the nexus point where ideas about modernity and blackness converged. That jazz represented both modernity and primitivity made this dialectic essential to jazz-based classical music. Some composers used antiquated notions of jazz—via the imaginary figure of the African primitive—to animate American concert music. Other composers used jazz as the embodiment of contemporary American life to draw on the cutting-edge currency of popular music.

### Organizing the Modernists

Concert jazz engaged directly with the musical languages of modernism—that which contrasted high culture with low culture, black with white, and past with present. It is difficult to talk about these three modernist dichotomies as separate entities. They intersected perennially. The distinction between highbrow and lowbrow was racial, and the construction of modernist symbols as either contemporary or pre-modern was dependent on racially

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 241 & 254.

<sup>105</sup> Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 11–53.

marked bodies, racial hierarchies, and pseudo-scientific discourses about race. The compositions of George Antheil, William Grant Still, John Powell, and Edmund Jenkins show just how inextricably linked these three dichotomies were. Each composer proposed different relationships between the dialectics to suggest answers to “the Jazz Problem.” Below I briefly summarize each chapter, though not in order of their appearance. I do this because I explain another layer to my argument which addresses a prominent shift in the way composers played with modernist dichotomies at different points in the development of the Symphonic Jazz Vogue.

Though George Antheil (1900—1959) was a composer well-known for the use of jazz in his symphonies, operas, and piano music, he is most remembered for his performance of *Ballet Mécanique* at Carnegie Hall in 1927. All four pieces performed that evening, including the *Ballet Mécanique* were inspired by jazz, but *The Jazz Symphony* (1925) was the closest Antheil came replicating jazz. Antheil even hired the Harlem Symphony Orchestra to perform the piece and W. C. Handy to conduct it. The one-movement rhapsodic work was commissioned by Paul Whiteman and based on what Antheil called “hyper-jazz”: a shocking blend of primitivism, futurism, and dada. The composer used outrageous caricatures of black popular music to inject classical music with vitality. His representations of black sound drew on both primitivist and futurist techniques to concoct an eerie connection between the sounds of industrialization and what people imagined were the drumming patterns of so-called African primitives. Though Antheil spent much of his life advocating for the use of jazz in high art contexts he did so at the expense of reinforcing a hierarchy between black and white sound.

The same year Antheil wrote *A Jazz Symphony* William Grant Still (1895—1978) composed *Levee Land* (1925), but his experimental use of jazz blurred the racialized musical

categories Antheil tried so hard to stratify. *Levee Land* is a four-song chamber composition featuring voice, and Still wrote it for Florence Mills. The internationally acclaimed vaudeville entertainer performed it at the 1926 concert organized by the International Composers Guild. Still, who arranged jazz numbers for dancebands and worked for the Pace & Handy publishing company, began studying with Edgard Varèse to pursue his interest in avant-garde composition. More than any other composer in this dissertation, Still challenged the distinction between jazz idioms and high modernist aesthetics. His extensive work as a jazz arranger enabled him to compose jazz *as* modernist concert music. Music that was coded white and coded black became impossible to differentiate in *Levee Land*. Still legitimated jazz much like Florence Mills did with her unparalleled success as a black entertainer. Together, they showed ICG audiences that jazz was high modernism.

Antheil and Still experimented with jazz to make radical statements about what U.S. modernist concert music should sound like. This was not always the case in jazz-based classical music. Important changes in both the popular and classical music worlds between 1922 and 1924 facilitated their bold use of jazz. These changes certainly included the critically acclaimed premiere of Gershwin's *Rhapsody* in 1924 but it was not limited to this event. Far more important, in fact, was jazz's reputation abroad. In 1922, Maurice Ravel reported to Edward Burlingame Hill that jazz was "the only original contribution America had so far made to music."<sup>106</sup> One year later, Darius Milhaud's jazz-inspired ballet *La Création du monde* premiered in Paris. Jazz was gaining acceptance in the art world and not just by Americans. At the same time, jazz was driving the recording industry and mass entertainment to unforeseen levels of production and profit, creating what I refer to as "the jazz explosion" and

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<sup>106</sup> Engel, "Jazz: A Musical Discussion," included in Keonig, 201.

what Kathy Ogren called “the jazz revolution.”<sup>107</sup> It came to represent American culture. So commonplace were comparisons of American culture to jazz that one writer for the *New Yorker* joked that the following line will be the lead for every article written in the next five years: “New York City is just a great, glorified, baffling jazz composition.”<sup>108</sup>

Composers prior to these developments still engaged with the same dialectics of modernism (highbrow vs. lowbrow, black vs. white, and past vs. modern), but they did it through very different compositional means and with very different outcomes. Edmund Jenkins (1894–1926), for example, used the Spirituals, black southern folk tunes, and Stephen Foster melodies to ground his composition, *Charlestonian: A Folk Rhapsody*, written in between 1917 and 1919 and premiered in 1924. His brief allusion to jazz does not last long, but it foreshadows a change in his stance toward jazz after 1922. Jenkins was a southern black composer who had experience as jazz band leader in London and Paris from 1921 until his early death in 1926. His commitment to pan-Africanism and racial uplift determined a more respectable representation of jazz. Initially he avoided “lowbrow” jazz—even in his recordings, where he strove to emulate Whiteman. After traveling to the United States in 1923 and working with Will Marion Cook and Will Vodery, Jenkins used jazz in more experimental ways. His operetta *Afram* (1923–1924) is altogether dependent on an eight-number jazz revue designed to be performed by Florence Mills and a Charleston-based troupe in a New York nightclub. *Afram* is an audacious response to “the Jazz Problem” in the wake of “the jazz explosion,” and it resonates with the avant-garde approaches of Still’s and Antheil’s 1925 compositions.

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<sup>107</sup> Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution*, 3–10.

<sup>108</sup> *New Yorker*, 20 November 1926, 17, quoted in Wald, 81.



The *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) of John Powell (1882 – 1963) premiered a year before Jenkins finished *Charlestonia*, but Powell used more dissonant representations of blackness in line with the primitivist art movement of the late 1910s. He made black culture sound noisy, and he accompanied his concerts with a lengthy program detailing the primitive actions of “black savages” his themes were designed to represent. Whereas Jenkins fully embraced jazz as the foundation of modernist composition after “the jazz explosion,” Powell disavowed the use of black music altogether. By 1922, he became a politically active white supremacist who worked with the Ku Klux Klan to preserve what he understood to be the racial integrity of the Anglo-Saxon race. By 1933 he declared “There is no real American negro music.”<sup>109</sup> Despite these political changes, he continued to perform the *Rhapsodie*, and it became one of the most performed pieces of symphonic jazz next to Gershwin’s *Rhapsody*.

Powell’s and Jenkins’s compositions, written just before 1920, relied on more conservative representations of blackness, in comparison to Antheil and Still. Powell’s and Jenkins’s very brief quotations of and sometimes faint allusions to jazz are controlled and cordoned off by older forms of representation such as the Spirituals and minstrelsy. These compositions were, for their time, still very experimental, but they represent an earlier era in the development of concert jazz. While still engaging with the modernist dialectics, they use traditional and sometimes nostalgic representations of blackness to forge a distinct American concert tradition.

Because their compositions were written when the word “jazz” was just beginning to circulate, Powell and Jenkins engaged directly with the transition between ragtime and jazz representing black dance music. Jazz, for many listeners, was merely an extension of ragtime:

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<sup>109</sup> “John Powell’s Assertion That There Is No Real American Negro Music Disproved By Eminent Musicians and Critics,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 28 January 1933, pg. 8.

“‘Jazz’...is Ragtime raised to the Nth power.”<sup>110</sup> However, jazz came to stand for much more: new approaches to and perhaps more extreme iterations of improvisation, metric accents, and timbre.<sup>111</sup> The popularity of jazz also supplanted the blues vogue of the 1910s.<sup>112</sup> Yet these terms, especially in the early 1920s, were sometimes used indiscriminately and interchangeably. Powell’s and Jenkins’s compositions used syncopation and, therefore, represented black dance music in general which could have signified ragtime or jazz for listeners. However, the moments in their compositions where black dance music is designated, they also used more complicated harmonies and experimental timbres that could have signified jazz to their audiences. However, their pieces were performed in the 1920s, and despite references to Stephen Foster songs and the Spirituals, they were heard as jazz. In this sense, their music represented black sound and jazz was the moniker of the age. This interchangeability speaks to the way the cultural imaginary of jazz held sway over the musical elements of its actual performance practice.

To account for the differences in approaches to concert jazz between Powell and Jenkins and Still and Antheil, my dissertation comprises two sections. The first section includes two case studies on early jazz-based compositions. Chapter One analyzes *Charlestonia: A Folk Rhapsody* (1919) by Jenkins, and Chapter Two analyzes *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) by Powell. In these chapters, I also demonstrate how Jenkins and Powell altered their approach to representing blackness in classical music because of the jazz explosion. Jenkins’s response to “the Jazz Problem” was to grab jazz by the horns and base an entire experimental

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<sup>110</sup> Rupert Hughes, “Will Ragtime Turn to Symphonic Poems?” *Etude* 38 (May 1920): 305, quoted in Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 16.

<sup>111</sup> For more on this transition, see: Ogren, 3–55; Wald, 49–59; and Berlin, 14–17.

<sup>112</sup> Hagstrom Miller, 147–155.

operetta on it. Powell denied the existence of black music altogether and downplayed his own work in this arena.

The second section of this dissertation includes another set of case studies on compositions written in 1925, after the commercial explosion of jazz and its increasing acceptance among art composers. Chapter Three examines Antheil's *A Jazz Symphony*, and Chapter Four, Still's *Levee Land*. In contrast to Powell's and Jenkins's pre-1920 works, the music of Antheil and Still is based on explicit uses of jazz. Jazz is the foundation of their compositions not a brief stylistic excursion. Before Chapters Two and Three, I stop to flesh out the important historical and musical developments that facilitated this historical shift in concert jazz developments. An interlude between the two sections explains why "the jazz explosion" altered how composers responded to "the Jazz Problem."

**Chapter One:**  
**From 'Folk Jazz' to Cosmopolitan Jazz: Edmund T. Jenkins and the Formation of the International New Negro**

The music of Charlestonian composer Edmund Thornton Jenkins (1894—1926) represents a shift in approaches to jazz-based classical music in the 1920s. Between 1919 and 1923, how Jenkins incorporated black vernacular music changed. *Charlestonia: A Folk Rhapsody*, written between 1917 and 1919, is a short orchestral piece based on the Spirituals, Steven Foster songs, and black Southern folk tunes. Allusions to jazz are present but subsumed under these older forms of black musical representation. *Afram*, an operetta about a star-crossed African Prince and Princess written in 1923, is more experimental both in its form and appropriation of jazz. Its denouement depends on an eight-number jazz revue performed in an U.S. nightclub, where the lovers unite.

Jenkins wielded the high/low, black/white, and past/present dichotomies differently in these two compositions. In *Charlestonia*, jazz idioms briefly appear but classical music envelopes them. These idioms are also surrounded by representations of blackness that signify historical experiences of black Americans. In *Afram*, jazz is the operetta's foundation, and it features the sounds and performances practices of popular theatre. Jazz is also used to represent black cosmopolitanism, and though *Afram* still uses the Spirituals and some Stephen Foster tunes they are placed in a new modern context—that of contemporary black entertainment.

Jenkins was both a classically trained musician and a skilled jazz performer, enabling him to traverse these modernist dialectics with ease. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1894, Jenkins played in his father's famous Jenkins Orphanage Band, a bastion of early jazz.

He became proficient on the violin and in composition at the Avery Institute—the city’s first free secondary school for African Americans. He then studied composition with Kemper Harreld at HBCU Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. In a trip to England in 1914 to lead one of his father’s orphanage bands, “The Famous Picaninnys [sic],” at the Anglo-American Exposition, Jenkins discovered an opportunity to study composition at the Royal Academy of Music until 1919. Jenkins continued to cultivate his talent for serious music in the 1920s. He premiered *Charlestonia* in Ostende in 1925, and he won *Opportunity’s* Holstein prize in 1926 for both his *African War Dance* and Sonata in A minor for cello.<sup>1</sup> He was just on the precipice of a flourishing career in classical music when his life was cut short by complications following an appendectomy in Paris at the age of thirty-two. Before his sudden death, he tried to find patronage for an all-black orchestra, *Afram* had been accepted for production in Paris,<sup>2</sup> and *Negro Symphonie Dramatique: Scenes de la Vie d’un Esclave*—a multi-movement symphony featuring blues and foxtrot numbers—was scheduled to be performed by the Pas de Loupe Concert Orchestra under the direction of Rhené-Baton.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, Jenkins was ensconced in the popular music industry. In London, he directed the Queen’s Hall Orchestra, featuring Jack Hylton, and he recorded their mixture of sweet and hot styles. The collaboration marked one of the earliest examples of a racially mixed band on record. They recorded seven times with His Master’s Voice and issued a number of 78s which featured over thirty-five songs, including the popular “Mon Homme” and “Coal

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Green, *Edmund Thornton Jenkins: The Life and Times of an American Black Composers, 1894—1926* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 154. Green’s thorough biography and his procurement of Jenkins’s papers and manuscripts made this research possible.

<sup>2</sup> Lucien H. White, “Brilliant Musician and Composers Lost to Race in Untimely Death in Paris of Edmund Thornton Jenkins, Sept. 12,” *New York Age*, 23 October 1926, Box 1, Folder 9, Edmund T. Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> “Pay Homage to Prominent Man’s Son,” *Dallas Express*, 16 October 1926, Box 1, Folder 20, Edmund Thornton Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Black Mammy.”<sup>4</sup> Jenkins left the band in November and shortly thereafter was invited to direct an Art Hickman orchestra at “one of the most *chic* of Paris’ [sic] tea and night dancing places.”<sup>5</sup> Jenkins composed a number of foxtrots, Charleston struts, blues, and cabaret songs, and he included them in the catalog of his publishing company, the Anglo-Continental-American Music Press. In essence, he composed classical music by day and led dance orchestras by night. It is no surprise then that his concert music was rooted in popular music.

Jenkins’s active role in both classical music and the jazz industry explains how and why he changed his approach to representing blackness in high art. This change emerged from developments in musical and political discourses among black intellectuals and artists in the 1920s. Jazz replaced the Spirituals as the primary way to depict black musical culture. This musical shift coincided with a political one. As jazz became equated with blackness, the New Negro Renaissance ushered in a new mode of artistic and political engagement. This mode was more confrontational but, at the same time, it extended pre-existing approaches to black equality rooted in the politics of respectability. I discuss these developments below before analyzing the modernist dialectics of *Charlestonia* and *Afram*.

### From the Spirituals to Jazz, From the “Old Negro” to the “New Negro”

Prior to the 1920s, the Spirituals occupied debates about what role black music would play in defining U.S. concert traditions.<sup>6</sup> The Fisk Jubilee Singers, who began touring in

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<sup>4</sup> Green chronicles each recording session with phenomenal detail. See Green, 95—110.

<sup>5</sup> Gwendolyn Bennett, “Edmund T. Jenkins: Musician,” *Opportunity* 3 (November 1925): 339, Box 1, Folder 13, Edmund Thornton Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the inner workings of this turn-of-the-century conversation, see: Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999); Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 13—112; Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 164—229; and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro*:

1871, produced the earliest known recording of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” in 1909; numerous “slave song” collections were published well into the 1920s; and, in 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois, a prominent intellectual, declared the “sorrow songs” “the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.”<sup>7</sup> Poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar and R. Nathaniel Dett thought the musical characteristics of the Spirituals were too crude in their original folk form.<sup>8</sup> They thought the Spirituals needed refinement and should be placed in the context of classical music in order to showcase the cultural achievements of black Americans. Many black musicians and composers did just this. Harry T. Burleigh, who studied with Czech composer Antonín Dvořák at the National Conservatory from 1893 to 1894, and Roland Hayes, a student of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1911, performed, arranged, and published the Spirituals.<sup>9</sup> After working with Burleigh, Dvořák instructed American composers to use “plantation melodies” and “slave songs.”<sup>10</sup> The writings and compositions of Dvořák along with the growing national prominence of these black composers had a major impact on the national sound of U.S. concert music. White composers, including Daniel Gregory Mason and Henry Gilbert used black folk songs, too, to carve out a distinctly American sound in the early twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

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*Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 447–475.

<sup>7</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903] (Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 156.

<sup>8</sup> Robert N. Dett, “The Development of the Negro Spirituals,” in *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals*, 4<sup>th</sup> group (Minneapolis: Schmidt, Hall and McCreary, 1936), 3, cited in Jon Michael Spencer, “R. Nathaniel Dett’s Views on the Preservation of Black Music,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 10:2 (Autumn 1982): 132–148.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 106–107; Jean E. Snyder, “A Great and Noble School of Music: Dvořák, Harry T. Burleigh, and the African American Spiritual,” in Tibbetts, John C., ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895* (Amadeus Press, Portland, OR 1993), 131; and Samuel Floyd, “The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Black Music Research Journal* 24:2 (Autumn 2004), 182.

<sup>10</sup> Antonín Dvořák, “Music in America,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (February 1895): 433.

<sup>11</sup> Two important examples include Henry F. Gilbert’s *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* (1910) and Daniel Gregory Mason’s String Quartet on Negro Themes in G minor, Op. 19 (1918–19).

By the 1920s, the language of black music had changed. Jazz galvanized debates about using the black vernacular in the concert hall.<sup>12</sup> Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson thought jazz was too commercial and lowbrow, and they kept their intellectual energy focused on the Spirituals.<sup>13</sup> Langston Hughes and Nora Zeale Hurston, however, celebrated jazz's originality and folk authenticity. Hughes revered working-class black culture and criticized the assignment of race progress solely to elites. Hughes commanded black Americans to embrace jazz, what he called "the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world."<sup>14</sup> Even Locke admitted that "the cloister-walls of the conservatory and the taboos of musical respectability" were strangling the potential of powerful black folk traditions.<sup>15</sup> For these leaders and artists, locating strategies to advance the race through art was shaped by apprehension about being too black or becoming too white. Black artistry was steeped in respectability politics wrought with anxieties about class. As jazz became synonymous with American culture, black composers came face-to-face with a different sort of "Jazz Problem."

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<sup>12</sup> Though the increasing acceptance of ragtime in classical music (mostly through the use of syncopation) occupied discussions in the 1900s and 1910s, discussions of these compositions had no where near the contentious overtones that writings about jazz in classical music did. Jazz was the first popular music genre composers had to really contend with precisely because of "the jazz explosion." For more on debates about ragtime, see: Edward Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 32–60. For a compilation of primary sources which illustrates this point, see: Karl Koenig, ed., *Jazz in Print (1856–1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002). For more on the emergence and definition of the word, "jazz," see: Alan P. Merriam and Fradley H. Garner, "Jazz—The Word" [1960], in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, edited by Robert G. O'Meally, 7–31 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Alain Locke, "The Negro Spirituals," in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* [1925] (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1992), 199–213; James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925); Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11–14; and Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1945* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 131. For a thorough analysis of Locke's position on jazz in the 1920s and 1930s, see Anderson, 113–166.

<sup>14</sup> Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, 23 June 1926, 694.

<sup>15</sup> Alain Locke, "Toward a Critique of Negro Music," in *The Works of Alain Locke*, edited by Charles Molesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 137.



The shift in musical discourse about black culture corresponds to a shift in political discourse. Prior to the 1920s, an essential strategy of equality was racial uplift. In the age of lynch law and minstrelsy, educated black men and women felt it was their responsibility to “defend the image and honor” of all black Americans, as historian Kevin Gaines puts it. Black leaders fought for civil and political rights by trying to prove the existence of a “better class” as evidence of race progress.<sup>16</sup> Du Bois, in his essay on the Talented Tenth, wrote that the “Best of this race” was accountable for “[guiding] the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst.”<sup>17</sup> Black composers were the “best of this race,” and they were charged, by black leaders such as Du Bois and Locke, to transform black folk music into elaborate works of art, to be beacons of race progress.<sup>18</sup> As a venerated black folkway, the Spirituals offered a fitting avenue for highlighting the racial character of black concert music.<sup>19</sup> Jazz, however, posed a problem. Its commercial and working-class associations (not to mention its tie to nightclub culture and sexual connotations) challenged the class distinctions enforced by respectability politics.

Just as jazz altered conversations about musical representations of blackness, the New Negro Renaissance impacted how people responded to racial inequality, especially through art. While this modernist movement did not upend respectability politics, it brought the issue of cultural elitism to a head. Made widely-known by the publication of Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* in 1925, the term “New Negro” was defined in opposition to the “Old Negro.” The

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1. For more on racial uplift, also see: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Schenbeck, 71–107; and Anderson, 113–166.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this interpretation of the Spirituals, see: Cruz, *Culture on the Margins*; Anderson, 13–112; and Radano, 164–229.

former was associated with servility and accommodation, the latter with assertiveness and modernity. The New Negro was a culmination of post-war racial changes. After the First World War and the 1919 race riots, the black freedom movement grew more persistent and ardent. Black art reflected this confrontational tone. Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" inspired black citizens to do so "fighting back."<sup>20</sup> With renewed fervor, artists, composers, and writers combated racist representations by forging radically new depictions of blackness. Augusta Savage's sculptures, Countee Cullen's poems, and Nella Larsen's novels were an affront to the white establishment's take on black identity and culture. This experimental ethos and defiant spirit led to a more receptive position toward jazz: Archibald Motley's depictions of jazz clubs, Claude McKay's *Banjo* about a drifter musician, and Jenkins's *Afram* were among them.

Yet, just like jazz did not eradicate the use of the Spirituals in the concert hall, the New Negro did not abolish racial uplift. It complimented it. Many intellectuals and artists stayed committed to a vision of racial uplift which privileged elite cultural products and older folk forms such as the Spirituals. Respectability politics were still part and parcel for some New Negroes, revealing a quite complex relationship to "the Jazz Problem." Jenkins draws on these various musical and political discourses as he engages modernism's dialectics in both *Charleston* and *Afram*. Below I analyze them to demonstrate his shift from older to modern representations of blackness and from using highbrow music to attenuate jazz to using black popular music to revolutionize highbrow forms.

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<sup>20</sup> Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows*, with an introduction by Max Eastman (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 53.

## Rhapsodizing Southern Black Folk

*Charlestonia* grapples with methods of depicting Southern black culture in concert music that were quite common in the 1910s. The piece was drafted between 1917 and 1919 while Jenkins was studying at the Royal Academy. It was intended for a full orchestra, but only an incomplete autograph piano score and autograph harp part remain. The score has handwritten instrumentation instructions.<sup>21</sup> It is a short work based on three distinct themes. Jenkins layers the themes and, at times, uses one theme to interrupt another one. In essence, he exploits rhapsodic norms, which privilege free-flowing development over rigidity. Its episodic form, enables the composer to bring markedly different musical material into a single composition. Each theme draws on stereotypical characterizations of Southern black culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the Spirituals, African folktales, and minstrelsy. Jenkins uses a rhapsody to present the various guises of black folk music. These representations resonate more with a racial uplift approach to using black music in high art context than New Negro artistic methods. However, *Charlestonia* challenges the focus of these conversations on the Spirituals by incorporating a Southern folk tune and a minstrel melody. Taken together, these three methods of characterizing black culture were based on the past—a convention the emergence of jazz and the New Negro would disrupt.

The first theme sounds like a Spiritual and its presentation is reminiscent of Dvořák's approaches to symphonic music. In a Lento-marked opening, a solo horn intones the first two measures alone much like the opening of the Largo movement of Dvořák's *New World Symphony*. Just like in this 1893 work, the melody is repeated in full over a tonic pedal replete

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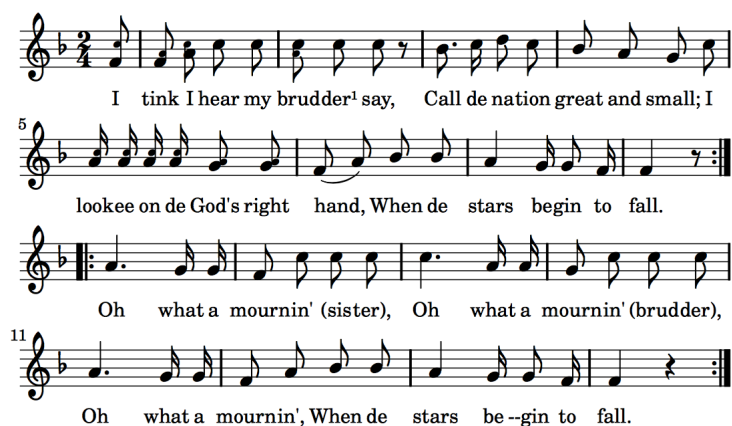
<sup>21</sup> In 1996, composer Vincent Plush reconstructed the piece using the wealth of instrument cues in the piano score and the existing harp part. He also wrote an ending. See: Edmund Thornton Jenkins, 1919, *Charlestonia – American Folk Rhapsody No.1*, with the Vocal Essence Orchestra conducted by Philip Brunelle, restored and orchestrated by Vincent Plush in 1996, Minneapolis, MN, Clarion CD CLR90.

with fluttering violins and then modulates to the subdominant in its development. The melody is simple, pentatonic, and propelled by slow harmonic motion. It emphasizes the tonic and the tonic chord, and its four-measure phrases delineate a sentence of the most basic kind (Figure 1.1). It ends with cadential stepwise descending motion through scale degrees 3-2-1. Jenkins referred to it as a “characteristic Negro melody.”<sup>22</sup> Its melodic qualities resonate with the Spirituals catalogued in various collections. One example is “Stars Begin to Fall” from *Slave Songs of the United States* (Figure 1.2). He also used Spirituals in his second rhapsody: *Rhapsodie Spirituelle*, written and premiered in 1919. They included “Swing Low” and “Nobody knows de trouble I see, Lord.”

Figure 1.1. Theme One, *Charleston* (1919), Edmund Jenkins



Figure 1.2. Melodic Transcription of the Spiritual, “Stars Begin to Fall”



Source: *Slave Songs of the United States: The Complete Collection of Slave Songs* [1867], compiled by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison (reprint, Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Program for the Coterie of Friends Coleridge-Taylor Orchestral Concert at Wigmore Hall, 7 December 1919, Box 1, Folder 4, Edmund T. Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

While the first theme of *Charlestonian* was a generalized melody designed to evoke the Spirituals, the second melody may be a quotation of a Southern folk song about “Br’er Rabbit.” African American author and artist Gwendolyn Bennett, writing for *Opportunity* in 1925, said this melody is why the rhapsody is called *Charlestonian*: “‘Brer Rabbit, what do you do dere’ is a tune well known to Charlestonians as that sung by the fisherman on the wharfs.”<sup>23</sup> Jenkins, who wrote to Bennett before she published her article, said “Remembering the tune from my childhood I was inspired to use it as the theme for my first rhapsodie.”<sup>24</sup> “Br’er Rabbit” was a trickster character with roots in African folktales. Charlestonians, in close proximity to the Gullah people of the Low Country, readily encountered West African culture.

Br’er Rabbit uses his intellect and wit to outsmart those higher on the food chain such as Br’er Fox. The Tar Baby story, published in Joel Chandler Harris’s 1881 collection of Uncle Remus stories, is a good example of how cunning the creature is, even in the face of death. In it, Br’er Fox makes a doll out of tar to ensnare the rabbit. When Br’er Rabbit walks by the Tar Baby, he is offended the inanimate object does not say “hello.” He fights the Tar Baby and, of course, gets stuck. Br’er Fox has caught the rabbit, but Br’er Rabbit outsmarts him. He begs the fox not to throw him into the briar patch, knowing, if the fox does, this will allow him to get free from the tar. The fox’s desire to hurt the Rabbit clouds his judgment. The fox falls for it; Br’er Rabbit escapes death. The rabbit served as a symbol of resistance

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<sup>23</sup> Bennett, 339.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

and survival for black slaves in the United States and a diasporic connection to Africa, because he “cunningly inverted the status quo of normal power relations.”<sup>25</sup>

Jenkins’s second theme shares qualities with the character of Br’er Rabbit. It is the fastest, the loudest, and the most dissonant. Though no extant evidence exists of a Br’er Rabbit folk tune similar to this melody, *Charleston*’s second theme, more than the first and third, seems to align with Br’er Rabbit’s exceptional negotiation of power structures. First and foremost, it is mixed meter. It is written as a shift between triple and duple time but the melodic cells exist in groups of five, suggesting quintuple meter (Figure 1.3). Of all the themes, it is the most syncopated. The second and fourth (of five) cells comprise a rhythmic figure common in ragtime and other black dance forms that emphasizes the upbeats of the subdivision of the pulse. Like the sly trickster figure, the meter is constantly shifting and the rhythm acts in unexpected ways. It is also the more dissonant of the themes with disjunct leaps at cells two and four. Yet, it is still very tonic oriented; intervallic motion away from the tonic always leads back to it. The flat seventh and minor third connect the melodic content to other black folk traditions such as the blues or the Spirituals.

Figure 1.3. Theme Two, *Charleston* (1919), Edmund Jenkins



<sup>25</sup> William Barlow, *Looking Up At Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 22, quoted in Samuel A Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from African to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 48.

In addition to the Spirituals, folktales became an increasingly common way to represent older traditions of black American culture. The American Folklore Society was founded in 1888, and members turned their eyes and ears to the South, which, according to Karl Hagstrom Miller, was thought to have authentic folk culture precisely because it was isolated from and, therefore, unadulterated by the modern and urban North.<sup>26</sup> Collections of black culture that emerged from ethnological studies were often rooted in problematic constructions of black Americans—riddled with nostalgia for life before the Civil War. They still bore the traces of minstrelsy.<sup>27</sup> Hagstrom Miller says that *Uncle Remus* “met success in part because it straddled the line between minstrelsy and ethnography, popular fancies and serious scholarship.”<sup>28</sup> This might have appealed to Jenkins who straddled the worlds of popular and art music. Yet, Br’er Rabbit tales were also widely known among black southerners of the nineteenth century and appeared in numerous collections of African folktales.<sup>29</sup> For black composers, the academic treatment of black folklore venerated these “low” forms, making them a richer quotation in a high art context. “B’rer Rabbit Fools Buzzard” even appeared in *The New Negro* (1925). It was collected by anthropologist Arthur Huff Fauset, who also made corrections to what he perceived to be grave errors in Harris’s *Uncle Remus* stories.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 87–120.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>29</sup> Some examples include John M. McBryde, Jr., “Brer Rabbit in the Folk-Tales of the Negro and Other Races,” *The Sewanee Review* 19:2 (April 1911): 185–206; and Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press and London, H. Milford, 1926). For a more exhaustive account, see: *African-American Traditions in Song, Sermon, Tale, and Dance, 1600s–1920: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature, Collections, and Artworks*, The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Black Music, compiled by Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Huff Fauset, “B’rer Rabbit Fools Buzzard,” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1925), 248–249. For Fauset’s scourging criticism of Chandler Harris, see: Fauset, “American Negro Folk Literature,” 238–244. Melodies accompany Fauset’s story but they do not match any of those in *Charlestonia*. Also see: Kathy Ogren, “‘What is Africa to Me?’: African Strategies in the Harlem Renaissance,” in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, ed. Sidney J. Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley (New York: Verso, 1994), 21.

The last theme of *Charleston* is another prevalent way black cultural history was depicted in the early twentieth century. It is a quotation of Stephen Foster's 1851 minstrel song, "Old Folks at Home" (Figures 1.4 & 1.5). The popular tune was marketed as an "Ethiopian melody" and was made famous by Christy's Minstrels, the most famous blackface group in the country led by Edwin Pearce Christy. The lyrics express a sentimental longing for the plantation from the perspective of a slave who has gained his freedom.<sup>31</sup> It uses dialect and pejorative terms such as "darky," which were common signifiers of the minstrel genre (Table 1.1).

Figure 1.4. Theme Three, *Charleston* (1919), Edmund Jenkins



Figure 1.5. Melody for "Old Folks at Home" (1851), Stephen Foster



Table 1.1. Lyrics of "Old Folks at Home" (1851), Stephen Foster

*Verse One*  
Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,  
Far, far away,  
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,  
Dere's wha de old folks stay.  
All up and down de whole creation  
Sadly I roam,  
Still longing for de old plantation,

<sup>31</sup> Susan Key, "Sound and Sentimentality: Nostalgia in the Songs of Stephen Foster," *American Music* 13:2 (Summer 1995): 145–166.



And for de old folks at home.

*Chorus*

All de world am sad and dreary,  
Eb-rywhere I roam;  
Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary,  
Far from de old folks at home!

*Verse Two*

All round de little farm I wandered  
When I was young,  
Den many happy days I squandered,  
Many de songs I sung.  
When I was playing wid my brudder  
Happy was I;  
Oh, take me to my kind old mudder!  
Dere let me live and die.

*Verse Three*

One little hut among de bushes,  
One dat I love  
Still sadly to my memory rushes,  
No matter where I rove.  
When will I see de bees a-humming  
All round de comb?  
When will I hear de banjo strumming,  
Down in my good old home?

Stephen Foster songs were commonly used in classical music leading up to the 1920s and even beyond.<sup>32</sup> Though Charles Ives is the composer now famous for his use of Foster melodies, Antonín Dvořák was more well-known at the time Jenkins was writing.<sup>33</sup> While teaching at the National Conservatory from 1892 to 1895, Dvořák wrote about American

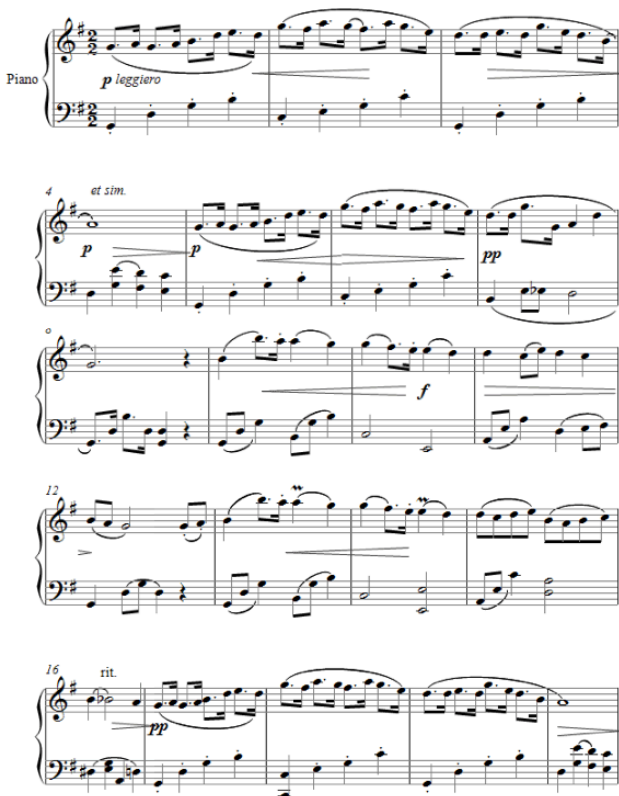
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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musial Americanism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 150; Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 337, 360, 550, 573, and 594. Composers did not always distinguish between various types of "black music." Aaron Copland, when asked about his concert jazz, said "commonplace jazz tunes and music of the *Old Black Joe* variety" influenced his compositions. See: "Jazz as Folk-Music," *Music America*, 1925, included in Koenig, 437.

<sup>33</sup> For more on Charles Ives's quotations of Stephen Foster songs and his revival in the 1920s, see: J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); and Jan Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music the Enjoyment of Music: An Introduction to Perceptive Listening* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

music, encouraging composers to not only draw on the Spirituals and slave songs but also plantation melodies and Stephen Foster tunes.<sup>34</sup> Thus it is not surprising that *Charleston*'s third melody sounds very similar to Dvořák's 1894 Humoresque No. 7, Op. 101 (Figure 1.6).<sup>35</sup> That Dvořák thought Foster's melodies were examples of actual black music reveals the slippages between the high/low and black/white dichotomies. *Charleston*'s third theme, then, is rich with allusions to American culture, and it embodies the way in which constructions of "black music" were filtered through racial hierarchies.

Figure 1.6. Melody of Humoresque No. 7, Op. 101 (1894), Antonín Dvořák



<sup>34</sup> Antonín Dvořák, "Music in America," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (February 1895): 433.

<sup>35</sup> I would like to thank Larry Starr for pointing out the similarities between *Charleston*'s third theme and Dvořák's Humoresque No. 7 during my presentation at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Society for American Music. I would also like to thank Gwynne Kuhner Brown for identifying Jenkins's quotation of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home" during my presentation at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Society for American Music. These two melodies are so similar they are often performed together. Alma Gluck and Efrem Zimbalist even recorded a duet for Victor in 1914 in which Gluck sang "Old Folks at Home" while Zimbalist played Humoresque No. 7.

While Jenkins quotes older representations of blackness, he was also forging newer ones. For example, the minstrel tune is wrapped in the diaphanous style of late Romantic musical idioms. The melody is riddled with chromatic neighbor and passing tones, and chromatic harmonies embellish local tonics as the phrase modulates rapidly. The large leaps juxtaposed against quick chromatic gestures create an unpredictable and expressive contour. It also avoids clear cadences so phrases ooze onto one another, making the melody appear endless. The melody repeats three times, but its two phrases, assigned to different instruments, overlap one another and modulate, stretching out its sense of time. It is characteristic of the pieces Jenkins studied and performed by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Camille Saint-Saëns.

Just as much as this final theme evokes a popular, almost seventy-year-old minstrel tune, it is also evidence of a burgeoning black classical music tradition—through its nod to both Romantic musical gestures and Dvořák. If much of Jenkins’s political work with The Coterie of Friends and the Pan-African Congresses centered on highlighting the achievements of black composers, this moment in *Charlestonia* demonstrated the effect of this work on his own style. He not only honored the history of black classical music but also used black historical folk music in the service of developing a contemporary black concert music tradition.

#### Charlestonia & the “Folk Jazz” of Alain Locke

At the same time *Charlestonia* relied on more traditional modes of representing black culture, it had elements of jazz that, though subtle, were ahead of their time. They foreshadowed the concert jazz vogue and Jenkins’s own shift in approaches to jazz-based classical music. *Charlestonia* hints at the changing position on jazz by members of the New

Negro Renaissance and gestures toward some of the discourse that would interest Locke and Hughes in a few years' time. I discuss these elements of jazz below and uses the piece's reception to show how critics—one of which was Alain Locke—interpreted them.

A cadenza after the first theme gestures toward jazz. In the development of the first theme, the clarinet abruptly stops on a secondary leading tone chord and begins to play a rapid descending chromatic passage, noted in the score as a cadenza (Figure 1.7). The clarinet then arpeggiates a secondary dominant seventh chord, which leads back to the theme. The cadenza, a staple of concert jazz by the mid-1920s, exploits similarities between the improvisatory sounds of solo concertos and the extemporaneous expression of jazz. This cadenza is short by comparison, and it is quickly replaced by a repeat of the melody, but it is a prescient symbol of a musical gesture that would soon become synonymous with George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Figure 1.7. Cadenza in *Charlestonia: A Folk Rhapsody* (1919) by Edmund T. Jenkins



Source: Edmund Thornton Jenkins, "Charlestonia: A Folk Rhapsody," dated 1917, manuscript, Box 2, Folder 23—24, Edmund Thornton Jenkins Scores and Other Material, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

The second theme evokes jazz more explicitly. Jenkins uses brass to articulate this syncopated melody, which undoubtedly evoked the black dance music increasingly dominating mass entertainment. Moreover, the trumpet and trombone interact with one another in a call and response texture. While the trumpet intones the melody, the trombone moves through a series of downward chromatic slides—a gesture evocative of early jazz bands. More often than not the trumpet and trombone are layered on top of one another, both parts comprising dense melodic activity and conjuring the sounds of polyphonic improvisation (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8. Second Theme, *Charleston: A Folk Rhapsody* (1919), Edmund T. Jenkins



Finally, *Charlestonia*'s form—a rhapsody—resonates with one conception of jazz as being highly spontaneous and emotive. Most rhapsodies “possess an inspired, rapturous character often expressed in an idiosyncratic, even improvisatory form.”<sup>36</sup> In the early nineteenth century, they tended to present a series of contrasting but impassioned moods not confined by a strict form. They sounded more erratic and spontaneous than controlled and predictable. In the late nineteenth century, the rhapsody took on nationalistic associations, evidenced by the work of Franz Liszt. Jenkins is among a group of composers who used this form to denote an American style based on black folk music. Others include Francis Poulenc's *Rhapsodie nègre* in 1917 and John Powell's *Rhapsodie nègre* in 1918, Rubin Goldmark's *Negro Rhapsody* in 1922, George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924, and James P. Johnson's *Yamekraw, A Negro Rhapsody* in 1928.<sup>37</sup> The rhapsody came to be readily associated with the American symphony by way of its dependence on black cultural representations.

Though *Charlestonia* was written between 1917 and 1919, it did not premiere until 1925, notably the year after the debut of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Jenkins's rhapsody was performed at the Kursaal in Ostende, Belgium under the direction of Francis Rasse. It received positive press. The *New York Herald* told readers “The first symphonic work by an American negro [*sic*] will be heard in concert.” An Ostende newspaper reported that it was “a great triumph” and “the composer, Mr. Jenkins, was loudly applauded.” *Comedia* of Paris called the performance “an unprecedented success.” In the black press, commentators noted its associations with jazz. *The Crisis* described the rhapsody using a term synonymous

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<sup>36</sup> John Rink, “Rhapsody,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/23313>).

<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that Henry Gilbert used the term four years earlier in his *Negro Rhapsody* (1913).

with concert jazz, writing it was “a syncopated symphony built largely on Negro themes.”<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, Locke, ten years later, used the label “folk jazz” to describe *Charlestonia*.

While the jazz references in *Charlestonia* may sound conservative to present day listeners, they were revolutionary to 1920s audiences. Alain Locke intimates this in *The Negro and His Music*. Locke wrote extensively about Jenkins, and he navigated the modernist dialectics of high and low, past and present to do so. About *Charlestonia*, he writes: “[Jenkins] broke with the romantic school that followed the footsteps of Dvořák and joined forces with the realistic school that discovered classical jazz by trailing the lowly footpaths of folk jazz.”<sup>39</sup> For Locke, Jenkins’s music embodied a rejection of the past (romantic school) and embrace of the modern (realistic school), and his work in the popular music industry enabled him to compose good jazz-based compositions.

Locke, however, was cynical about the popular music industry. He believed jazz was valuable in so far as it could enhance art music. He distinguished between a “superficial jazz that is superficially Negroid” and a “deeper jazz that is characteristically Negro,” so he could isolate exceptional composers such as Jenkins and William Grant Still. Only they created a “true union and healthy vigorous fusion of jazz and the classical tradition.”<sup>40</sup> However, when he described Jenkins as a “graduate of the jazz ranks,” he meant it disparagingly, even if he later conceded that “the fruits of that apprenticeship have deepened the skill and racial character of [his] more formal music.”<sup>41</sup> Locke’s ambivalence toward jazz permeated his writings. He praised jazz’s originality and racial character, on the one hand, and argued for its redemption through high art, on the other. His “teleological model of cultural evolution,”

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<sup>38</sup> The reviews in this paragraph are quoted in Green, *Edmund Thornton Jenkins*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> Locke, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 130 and 114.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 111.

according to American Studies scholar Paul Allen Anderson, was based on the standards of white European cosmopolitanism. Locke wanted African American music to “parallel the direction of recent European concert idioms.”<sup>42</sup> He urged black artists to strive for a universal mode of “elite cultural production” that was “without trace of folk idiom and influence.”<sup>43</sup>

Locke remained skeptical of jazz, but Jenkins became a transitional figure who drove New Negro cultural expressions straight toward jazz. Though Jenkins’s use of jazz idioms in his 1919 *Charlestonian* is subtle, this folk rhapsody was still a bold musical statement, and, to be sure, it was an important precursor to the symphonic jazz vogue of the 1920s. However, Jenkins would jettison these older modes of black representation in exchange for brazen displays of modern black popular music. By 1921, he would join a cohort of New Negro artists—Langston Hughes, Nora Zeal Hurston, and Claude McKay, among others—that dedicated their careers to celebrating the cultural worth of black vernacular and dance music. Furthermore, Jenkins used his composition *Afram* to map a much different cartography of blackness. It was grounded in the international scope of the New Negro Renaissance as well as the diasporic awareness of Jenkins’s pan-Africanist politics.

### Edmund Jenkins, International New Negro

Jenkins’s compositional career embodies the shift in approaches to jazz-based classical music after the unprecedented success of jazz. Whereas *Charlestonian* subtly and only briefly used jazz idioms, *Afram* is constituted by jazz, and Jenkins employed it to make a political statement about the international black freedom movement. He departs from conservative viewpoints on black popular music, reflected in Locke’s writing, to adopt jazz on more holistic

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<sup>42</sup> Allen, 122—123.

<sup>43</sup> Locke, 9.



and celebratory terms. That is, he did not just include a jazz-inspired melody or pepper the piece with syncopation, Jenkins placed jazz—its harmony, texture, and form as well as the performance practices of black entertainers—at the center of his composition. He also used jazz to experiment with genre and challenge concert traditions in the same way George Antheil and William Grant Still would in 1925. In response to “the Jazz Problem,” Jenkins endorsed jazz as a venerable tradition that had much to offer art music. This perspective emerged out of his ensuing jazz career and political activism—both of which aligned with New Negro philosophies.

Jenkins had become an international jazz artist with a career centered in Paris, the home to many New Negroes. He led dancebands in London, Paris, Ostende, and the United States, and he was an important connection for other black musicians traveling through Europe including James P. Johnson, Will Vodery, and Sydney Bechet. He collaborated with and briefly took over Will Marion Cook’s Southern Syncopated Orchestra when they traveled overseas.<sup>44</sup> In November of 1921, Jenkins left The Queen’s Dance Orchestra and began directing an Art Hickman orchestra in a trendy Paris nightclub. He called it the International Seven.<sup>45</sup> They were met with a jazz craze. The development of *le jazz-hot* in Paris was bookended by the Louis Mitchell Jazz Kings performing in 1919 and Ada Bricktop’s regular appearances at Gene Bullard’s club Le Grant Duc.<sup>46</sup> A vogue for primitivist notions of blackness—or what was often referred to as *négritude*—culminated in Josephine Baker’s *La*

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, see: Howard Rye, “Chronology of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra: 1919—1922,” 30:1 (Spring 2010): 5—17; Howard Rye, “Southern Syncopated Orchestra: The Roster,” *Black Music Research Journal* 30:1 (Spring 2010): 19—70; and Howard Rye, “The Southern Syncopated Orchestra: Addenda,” 30:2 (Fall 2010): 383—389.

<sup>45</sup> William A. Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 34—70.

*Revue nègre* in 1925.<sup>47</sup> Montmartre, in particular, looked like Harlem. Bricktop called it *le tumulte noir* to signify the growing number of black American performers.<sup>48</sup> Jenkins was a part of this swell of jazz in Paris.

At the same time Jenkins established his jazz career, he also built international communities committed to the global inequality of black people. Jenkins served as a committee member of the African Progress Union, a London-based association dedicated to the “welfare of African and Afro-peoples.”<sup>49</sup> His other political work centered around music as important means to advance and uplift the race. He formed his own fraternal organization. The Coterie of Friends educated its members about “people of colour” and organized social gatherings for elite black Europeans centered on black classical music. In 1919, he conducted a “Coleridge-Taylor Orchestral Concert” for the Coterie. Guests of honor included Florence Mills, Will Vodery, Shelton Brookes, and James P. Johnson, whose orchestra performed the program.<sup>50</sup> It featured *Variations on an African Air* (1905), among other pieces, and his daughter Gwendolyn Avril Coleridge-Taylor, a composer, delivered a monologue with musical accompaniment. Other guests of honor included intellectuals committed to the pan-African movement.<sup>51</sup> It was advertised in *West Africa*—a London-based publication which announced news and discussed issues about the British colonies of West Africa. Jenkins also helped W. E. B. Du Bois arrange musical programming for the 1921 and 1923 Pan-African Congresses.<sup>52</sup>

Jenkins was a cosmopolitan New Negro deeply connected to the international foot traffic of black musicians and politicians. Though the movement is often associated with the

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<sup>47</sup> Tyler Stovall, *Pair Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Shack, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Green, 64—66.

<sup>50</sup> Program for The Coterie of Friends Concert at Wigmore Hall, December 7, 1919.

<sup>51</sup> Green, 79.

<sup>52</sup> Green, 102—103.

bevy of artists, leaders, and socialites centered in Harlem, scholars such as Davarian Baldwin have drawn attention to black Americans, who traipsed the globe, mapping topographies of racial solidarity within new cultural contexts. They contributed to a broader black international movement of racial awakening—an awakening with a diasporic lens.<sup>53</sup> The explosion of jazz in the United States and Europe thrust Jenkins into the international New Negro movement and he used jazz more explicitly to claim the value of black entertainment culture. He also used it to articulate a political statement about global black equality.

### *Afram's Cosmopolitan Jazz*

*Afram* was conceived and written during Jenkins's own international travels between various New Negro hubs across the globe. In 1923, Jenkins had left Paris and traveled to the United States to work with Will Marion Cook. He met Cook in Paris. Cook thought Jenkins was “the best musician in the colored race” and “the very best instrumentalist in any race,” so he invited him to conduct what would become Cook's *Negro Nuances* (Figure 1.9).<sup>54</sup> However, the show got off to a bad start, so Jenkins withdrew before opening night. Determined to succeed in his native country, though, Jenkins stayed with Will Vodery in Harlem (and later Robert Young in Baltimore, Maryland) while looking for work and financial support. He found none. Several months later he returned to Paris, where he turned his attention to *Afram*.

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<sup>53</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, “Introduction: New Negroes Forging a New World,” in *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem*, edited by Minkah Makalani and Davarian L. Baldwin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1–27. For more on the Harlem Renaissance, see: Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> Will Marion Cook to Rev. Daniel Joseph Jenkins, 7 March 1923, Box 1, Folder 2, Edmund T. Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Figure 1.9. Advertisement for Will Marion Cook's *Negro Nuances* featuring Edmund Jenkins, 1924



Source: Advertisement for Will Marion Cook's *Negro Nuances* featuring Edmund Jenkins, *The New York Age*, 19 January 1924, p. 6, Box 1, Folder 5, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Jenkins's nine-month stint in Harlem and Baltimore left an indelible impression on his music; the political possibilities of black American entertainment infused *Afram*. Yet, his international career gave him a unique understanding of jazz's cultural significance beyond the confines of the United States. The incomplete piano and vocal manuscript of *Afram* indicates a three-act work which tells the love story of an unnamed African Prince and Princess Bella Twita, who are separated by the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>55</sup> The Prince has won a war for the King of Dahomey but has traveled to the United States (for unspecified reasons) and asks the Princess (the King's daughter) to come to him: "Do not let yourself be discouraged, put off by the seas and the mountains." While waiting for the Princess, the Prince watches a

<sup>55</sup> The manuscript is housed at the Center for Black Music Research, whose collection and support facilitated this research: Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram ou La Belle Swita*, manuscript, Box 1, Folder 1—3, Edmund Thornton Jenkins Scores and Other Material, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago. I would like to thank Chris Peck for helping me make Finale examples, Peter D'Elia and Travis Thatcher for recording some of the songs, and Shannon Morris for helping me translate the French. The manuscript is very difficult to read. This piece was never performed but was recently reconstructed by composer Tom Cabaniss and novelist James Hannaham, and it was performed, under the direction of David Herskovits, at the 2016 Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

variety stage show in a nightclub. She finally arrives, and they unite over the jazz-inflected songs of the concluding revue, which is performed by a Charleston vaudeville troupe. The operetta, therefore, carves out two distinct subjects: African nobility, who use traditional operatic forms and sing in French, and black American entertainers, who perform syncopated Tin Pan Alley tunes and sing blues songs in English. Yet, the African characters and the performance troupe sing the last song of *Afram* together, reflecting the significance of black solidarity across national and ethnic lines.

A combination of variety theater entertainment and high opera, *Afram* signals ahead to the New Music Theater of Kurt Weill and Ernst Krenek, while also extending pre-existing traditions of combining vernacular and art music within black entertainment. Will Marion Cook's *In Dahomey*, for example, used a "high operetta style" in some of his musical's numbers.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, the all-black vaudeville troupe called The Black Patti Troubadours (featuring soprano Sissieretta Jones) performed what musicologist Kristen Turner has called an "operatic kaleidoscope" at the end of their show.<sup>57</sup> *Afram* also bears a striking resemblance to Will Vodery's *From Dover Street to Dixie*, which premiered in London in 1923. The first half is set in London and played by white fashionable aristocrats, whereas the second half is set in New York and features the plantation scenes of revues performed by black entertainers (notably Florence Mills).<sup>58</sup> These works, like *Afram*, operated at the borders of black popular

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<sup>56</sup> John Graziano, "In Dahomey," in *Black Theatre: U.S.A.* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 65. Also, see: Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890–1914* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Thomas L. Riis, ed., *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, Music of the United States, vol. 5 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, Inc., 1996); and Marva Griffin Carter, *Swing Along: The Musical Life of Will Marion Cook* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Kristen Turner, "A Blending of Comedy, Burlesque, Vaudeville and Opera': The Black Patti Troubadours and the Meaning of High Art in Popular Culture," paper presented at the 2016 Annual Conference of the Society for American Music, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>58</sup> For more on this vaudeville show, see: David Linton and Len Platt, "Dover Street to Dixie and the Politics of Cultural Transfer and Exchange," in *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin*, edited by Len Platt, Tobias Becker, and David Linton, 170–186 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

music and highbrow culture. They also complicated the way in which the high/low divide intersected with the black/white divide.

In *Afram*, jazz is a modern cosmopolitan product unifying the black citizens of the world. Jenkins articulates this conception of jazz through his negotiation of the three modernist dialectics: high/low, black/white, and past/present. First, jazz is not subsumed under classical music; it is juxtaposed against it. However, black vernacular forms—not all of which are jazz—occupy more time in the operetta than the opera forms. In addition, Jenkins's depictions of popular music push against the high/low divide because, as I demonstrate below, they are more middlebrow in character. Second, Jenkins's representations of blackness are not confined to popular music. They exist in the form of arias and recitatives sung by the African King, Prince, and Princess. Thus, *Afram* complicates the way in which the high/low divide typically intersected with race. Third, it is through the operetta's diasporic plot that his complex representations of blackness intersect with the past/present dichotomy. Africa is not a primitivist product to vivify white concert music; it exemplifies contemporary blackness articulated in and through jazz.

*Afram* adopts many norms of black entertainment which relied on older representations of black culture but he uses them in a modern context—a vaudeville show in a nightclub. While the Prince is in America waiting for the Princess, he watches a revue which includes the following: : 1) a plantation scene featuring an instrumental “lamentation” and the Spiritual “O Bye and Bye” in four-part harmony 2) a syncopated instrumental selection called “Dance of the Cotton Pickers,” 3) another four-part Spiritual, “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See,” 4) two Stephen Foster songs “In the Evening by the Moonlight,” also set to four-part harmony, and “Old Black Joe,” 5) a barbeque scene featuring a vamped and syncopated version of Lil’

Liza-Jane, which was based on a minstrel character and musically similar to Foster's Camptown Races, and a Cake Walk.

Plantation scenes were not uncommon in 1920s stage theater. Replete with bales of cotton, minstrel songs and characters, Spirituals, and cakewalks, depictions of plantation life were especially common in turn-of-the-century black entertainment.<sup>59</sup> However, as black performers became an essential part of the entertainment industry, plantation scenes were not always interpreted as racist characterizations of black Americans.<sup>60</sup> Ethnic studies scholar Jayna Brown says they were "encoded moments of historical memory" as much as they offered new meanings, reframed within contemporary contexts.<sup>61</sup> This does not of course preclude the possibility of these moments fulfilling white fantasies about plantation life stoked by minstrelsy.

*Afram's* plantation scene suggests a more nuanced meaning. Jenkins concludes this long scene with a cakewalk. The dance first became popular as finales for minstrel shows in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> However, by the 1920s, black performers were using it to lampoon the social pretensions of the *black* aristocracy.<sup>63</sup> This could be the case with *Afram* as the cakewalk directly precedes a reprise of the Prince's aria, in which he sings to the Princess, "Do you hear my voice that calls you from this far away?" That a nineteenth-century dance

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<sup>59</sup> For more on these entertainment tropes, see: Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890s–1915* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); and Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Here I am drawing on Karen Sotiropoulos, who makes this argument about black entertainers in the 1890s in her book *Staging Race* (cited in full above). Sotiropoulos argues that black performers "manipulated the stage mask in innovative ways that helped them forge a space for dialogue with their black audiences" at the same time they "played to the white desire for racist stereotypes" to maintain a theater career (pg. 2).

<sup>61</sup> Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 161–162.

<sup>62</sup> Sotiropoulos, 37. Also see: Marshall Winslow Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968); and Brooke Baldwin, "The Cakewalk: A Study in Stereotype and Reality," *Journal of Social History* 15:2 (Winter 1981): 205–218.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, 146–147.

now used to critique black elites—in essence, the Talented Tenth—frames the Prince’s aria demonstrates precisely how plantation scenes could be rendered anew, a residue of the past made modern. Though the use of Spirituals and Stephen Foster songs represented older representations of blackness in *Charlestonia*, the plantation scene in *Afram* had the potential to resonate with contemporary black culture.

In *Afram*, Jenkins also portrays modern black working-class culture in quite conventional ways. “The Charleston Revue,” in particular comprises many stock characters of vaudeville and their musical tropes. “The Levee Lounge Lizard” is slow blues number. With dialect, the protagonist tells the listener he is “Mister Rastus / Lord of Levee fame / Ain’t nobody going to make me change my name / I’ve lived for years in this self same spot / And I’ll live another two scores ‘fore I’m prepared to drop.” The piano accompaniment imitates guitar strumming, a walking bass, and a repetitive ornamental gesture emphasizing the blues scale. Given a pejorative minstrel name, this character expresses content in his rural obstinacy and lackluster blues career. To compensate for his lack of fame and wealth (“I ain’t no movie star / I ain’t no desert shah), he asserts his heterosexual prowess (“But when I get behind the women folks / I shows them where they are”).

“Kentucky Kate,” another stock character, is a “low down strutter.” Over a walking bass, she lures the audience in with her mysterious identity: “Perhaps you’d like to know who I am?” In keeping with a blues phrase structure, her melodies are, at first, syllabic and syncopated, but each phrase ends on a sustained note, letting its confident sentiment linger. She is both itinerant and feisty, not subjected to the mores of middle-class femininity and sexuality. Her identity is her invention, she proclaims, as she plays “highbrow” and “pure” but also “poh” and angry. The stereotype of the aggressive southern working-class black woman



culminates in the final verse: “Nobody bet not flurry me / Cause I ain’t go tell in no high falutin words / In my powest language / I generally gives the bird.”

Jenkins’s depictions of black working-class stereotypes could have been interpreted as a provocation against some strains of racial uplift discourse—those which eschewed nightclub culture, dancing, and public expressions of sexual desire. “Kentucky Kate” even mocks the black aristocracy, claiming pride in more direct forms of confrontation (i.e., giving someone “the bird”).

Jenkins complicates these lowbrow representations by notating who he wanted to perform the revue. In a hand-written note on the score, Jenkins indicated that he wanted an authentic Charleston-based dance troupe and a vaudeville performer the likes of Florence Mills. Mills’ career and performance persona were more highbrow. Mills had an international reputation as a black vaudeville performer after her roles in the 1921 *Shuffle Along* on Broadway and the 1923 *Dover Street to Dixie* in London. She was revered by black intellectuals and elites for her international breakthrough and the fact that she used her commercial success as a platform to speak out against racial inequality. Her “outspoken race loyalty,” according to Jayna Brown, quelled “black anxieties about the deleterious effects of cosmopolitanism and commercialism.”<sup>64</sup> Like Jenkins, she represented the nexus at which respectability politics and New Negro internationalism intersected. Audiences and critics wrote about her in explicitly modern terms. Mills was “the New Black Woman—urban, emancipated, cultivated, traveling abroad to represent the black cultural capital and the mobility of its people.”<sup>65</sup> So while “Kentucky Kate” drew on classed and sexualized markers of

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<sup>64</sup> Brown, 240.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 245.

black female entertainers, its performance by Mills would have given it a more highbrow reading.

In these and other numbers of the full cabaret, Jenkins uses stereotypes through classed and gendered markers. They establish a difference between the cabaret's performers and its wealthy audience members, African nobility. They seem to be there to serve and entertain elite black men and women. In this way, the operetta can be seen to reinforce the distinction between working-class blacks and the black aristocracy so essential to racial uplift ideologies. Kentucky Kate and the Levee Lounge Lizard were the mass to be led by the educated and professional minority. This class hierarchy materializes even more poignantly when the Princess first enters the Charleston nightclub with her black servant, Liza. Likewise, the Prince, angry he is alone, rudely interrupts the show, calling it an "empty spectacle."

Though *Afram's* depictions of blackness refracted class inequalities of the United States, Jenkins paints African Americans in a much more multifaceted way than he does his African characters, as I demonstrate below. The Prince and Princess are assigned the same, static sentiment and they repeat it, with the same melodies, over the course of multiple duets and arias. The sheer number of black American characters and diversity of their expression delineate more nuanced identities. The most dynamic character is Tom, a young black man, who welcomes and seats guests at the Charleston nightclub. In the skit, Tom abruptly stops to demand a fair wage for his labor from his white manager. He audaciously asks the manager for ten percent of the evening's receipts. Though interrupted by the start of the revue, the dialogue provides a window into Jenkins's commitment to black equality through representation, even for the other ninety percent.

## Jazz & the Black Diaspora

Jenkins belief in the cultural significance of jazz is most explicitly articulated through *Afram*'s diasporic plot. Pan-Africanism saturates the libretto. When the Prince sings about the Princess, he always mentions her continent of origin, making it hard not to hear a subtext of love for the homeland of the African diaspora: "On the African earth / ardent and so far away / My hopeful love / My arms take your waste and I am at your knees." In *Afram*, the Princess *is* Africa, and she represents the solidarity of black citizens living in hostile nations across the globe. In this last section, I discuss these various representations of blackness and how they draw out the past/present dichotomy. I conclude by talking about how Jenkins crafted a singular international black culture through the final number of *Afram*, a foxtrot.

Du Bois captured this philosophy better than anyone.<sup>66</sup> When Jenkins was writing the operetta, Du Bois, with whom Jenkins frequently corresponded, had just completed the third Pan-African Congress and often wrote about the continent in *The Crisis*. He argued for its decolonization and raised awareness about the shared struggle of the "darker races." He also wielded the continent as a cultural symbol for black heritage and distinctiveness: "Africa is the Spiritual Frontier of human kind," he proclaimed.<sup>67</sup>

The symbolic capacity of Africa was also essential to New Negro discourse. It permeated the pages of *The New Negro*. The anthology features African-inspired illustrations: "masks and statues from Bushongo, Sudan-Niger, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, and the Congo." Several of the articles assert that Africa is the origin of several important New Negro

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<sup>66</sup> For more on Du Bois's pan-Africanism, see: Kwadwo O. Pobi-Asamani, *W. E. B. Du Bois: His Contribution to Pan-Africanism* (San Bernadino, CA: Borgo Press, 1993); Tamba E. M'bayo, "W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africanism in Liberia, 1919–1924," *Historian* 66:1 (Spring 2004): 19–44; and Anthony J. Ratcliff, "The Radical Evolution of Du Boisian Pan-Africanism," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5:9 (March 2013): 151–170.

<sup>67</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Little Portraits of Africa," *The Crisis* 27 (April 1924): 273.

cultural forms. Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage," asked "What is Africa to me?" in a larger section called "The Negro Digs Up His Past." Locke asserted that "Africa was a valuable source of artistic ideas and disciplines."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Du Bois amended one of his most famous proclamations that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."<sup>69</sup> In the last essay of *The New Negro*, "Worlds of Color," Du Bois "extended his color line analogy" in the wake of World War I by focusing on imperialism in Africa and the exploitation of labor.<sup>70</sup>

These New Negro sentiments are echoed in *Afram*'s final chorus: "Long live the African country from which the lovers have come to this American land where they found each other." Behind *Afram*'s love story lies an operetta fundamentally about diasporic mappings. A story about mobility, migration, exile, and homecoming, this operetta is sutured together by its reverence for Africa as original homeland.

Much like the highbrow musicals of Jenkins's colleague, Will Marion Cook, *Afram* depicts adoration for Africa but sometimes through a reductive cultural lens that makes problematic assumptions about what it means to be and sound African. The operetta comprises an assemblage of references to divergent parts of the continent. The title "*Afram*" refers perhaps to a setting, maybe the Ghanaian river. The subtitle describes "La Belle Twita" as "Roman Africain," calling forth an ancient North African past. And the "Danse de Guerre" (which celebrates the King of Dahomey's victory) is a Zulu war-song, sung by the Prince's soldiers and replete with plodding bass lines, clamorous dynamics, and harmonic dissonance (Figure 1.10). It comes from *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* (1921) by

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<sup>68</sup> Kathy Ogren, "'What is Africa to Me?': African Strategies in the Harlem Renaissance," in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism*, ed. Sidney J. Lemelle and Robing D. G. Kelley, (New York: Verso, 1994), 22.

<sup>69</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903] (Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ogren, 21.

ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis, and it was intended to be used to ramp soldiers up *before* a battle. Jenkins's cocktail of African references yields a sometimes confusing representation of the continent's diverse inhabitants, and his treatment of Africans as soldiers performing loud and percussive music invokes primitivist stereotypes gaining traction in the 1910s.

Figure 1.10. Piano reduction of "Danse de Guerre," *Afram* (1924), Edmund Jenkins



However, this simplistic characterization of Africa is complicated by the Zulu war-song's context, which Jenkins would have encountered in the text. Its transcriber, Madikane Čele wrote:

The white man is apt to think of the black man as a yoked and subject being. But when first encountered by the British, the Zulus were a strong and proudly militant people whose highly trained armies were the pride and glory of their kings...It cannot be forgotten how, with only the [short javelin and shield], the naked hosts kept at bay the firearms of the English.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Natalie Curtis, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent: Recorded from the Singing and the Sayings of C. Kamba Simango (Nǃau Tribe, Portuguese East Africa) and Madikane Čele (Zulu Tribe, Natal, Zululand, South Africa)* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1921), 63.

The historical legacy of songs such as these was a point of racial pride for New Negroes.

Within a pan-Africanist framework, depictions of black Africans with warlike fortitude—like those in Cullen’s poem, “Heritage,” for example—symbolized resistance to violent formations of white supremacy.

For the most part, *Afram* is a depiction of modern black African subjectivities.

However, “Danse de Guerre” calls forth a more complicated relationship between representations of blackness and the past/present dichotomy. Jenkins used Africa to construct a history of the black diaspora. *Afram* is fundamentally a story about the transmigration of black subjects, Africans finding a home in the United States. The Black Atlantic, as Paul Gilroy theorizes, was not only a transnational habitus traversed by New Negroes to “form a compound culture from disparate sources” but also a metaphor for imagining a history lost in what Stephanie Smallwood calls “saltwater slavery.”<sup>72</sup> Arthur Schomburg’s essay “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” featured in Locke’s *The New Negro*, elucidates why constructing a history of the diaspora—a legacy of the Atlantic slave trade—was absolutely critical to the black freedom movement.

The Negro is a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture. But a new notion of the cultural attainment and potentialities of the African stocks has recently come about, partly through the corrective influence of the more scientific study of African institutions and early cultural history, partly through growing appreciation of the skill and beauty and in many cases the historical priority of the African native crafts, and finally through the signal recognition which first in France and Germany, but now very generally the astonishing art of the African sculptures has received. Into these fascinating new vistas, with limited horizons lifting in all the directions, the mind of the Negro has leapt forward faster than the slow clearing of scholarship will yet safely permit. But there is no doubt that here is a field full of the most intriguing and inspiring possibilities. Already the Negro sees himself against a reclaimed background, in a perspective that will give pride and self-respect

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15; Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–8.

ample scope, and make history yield for him the same values that the treasured past of many people affords.<sup>73</sup>

The recuperation of black heritage was a project of liberation. Artists, composers, and writers tapped into the imaginative aspects which the creative process necessitated when extant evidence and ancestral knowledge did not exist. Jenkins created a black past in and through his African characters, but this history propels his modern subjects—dispersed across the globe and ultimately united in the United States through jazz.

It is the precise way *Afram* ends that signifies not only Jenkins's more radical take on jazz but also his engagement with the class and national differences that make up the international black freedom movement. "The Charleston Revue," which concludes the cabaret and serves as the scenic backdrop of the Prince and Princess re-uniting, has the most explicit references to jazz music. It brings the African lovers together. It comprises a mixture of jazz dances, vaudeville choruses, and blues numbers. The opening chorus and finale demonstrate the extent to which jazz inflected this revue. They have regular syncopation, including some ragtime figures, and seventh chords appear frequently. In case the audience does not hear it, the lyrics of the first and last numbers self-consciously identify the entertainers as performing jazz: "We're the dapper strutting steppers / Full of red hot southern poppers / Of one fame you've surely heard / We don't have to say a word / Just that rhythm and our feet." The last concludes with: "Do that thing / with a fling / Hit it up / slip it up / Jazz it up / dazz it up / Walk, talk, dance, prance / Snap, stomp, yell with all your might / because it's / Joy time in Caroline hello." This eight-number revue is written to epitomize jazz.

After the revue ends, the Prince and Princess see one another and embrace. The Princess sings a recitative which leads into the Prince's aria, returning for a fourth time with

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<sup>73</sup> Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," *The Survey*, 1 March 1925, 670.

the same theme. Next is the “Danse d’Amour,” returning for the third time, and then the “Foxtrot for Jazz Orchestra.” The foxtrot is unwritten, but on the blank score a note indicates that it is to be based on the rhythm of the Prince’s aria. After the foxtrot, everyone—the performance troupe, the cabaret audience, and the African couple—come together and sing the final chorus. Though *Afram* begins by separating popular and classical music in the first two acts, it concludes, in the third act, by hybridizing them to bring all the performers together. Fault lines of black nationalities erode and a vision of black solidarity takes place, even as Africa becomes the foundation on which to fasten these new modern subjectivities. The operetta concludes with all of those on stage singing: “Long live the African country from which the lovers have come to this American land where they found each other.”

### Jenkins’s Death, His Legacy

Jenkins returned to Paris in 1924 and struggled to get support for his innovative ideas until he died two years later. When he moved back to Paris, he was discouraged by the lack of opportunities for black composers and entrepreneurs in the United States. Gwendolyn B. Bennett, writing in *Opportunity*, said Jenkins came to America “filled with enthusiasm about some sort of musical plan,” but he left utterly discouraged after being reminded of “the frightful prejudice that hounds the American Negro’s every thought and action.”<sup>74</sup> For many African American artists and musicians, the United States was not safe and not an economically viable place to live when compared to European cities such as London and Paris. Jenkins expressed this sentiment in a letter to his father on April 20, 1926: “It is very strange to me that you should continue to say to me come back home and all that sort of thing

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<sup>74</sup> Bennett, 339.



when you know that I have already been back home and tried to find an opening that would be compatible with my life's work and ambition."<sup>75</sup>

Tyler Stovall, William Shack, and Jeffrey Jackson argue that Paris provided a more financially and socially supportive home for African American artists, but this was not the case for Jenkins.<sup>76</sup> While Paris ameliorated some frustrations, he still struggled financially to "back [his] ideas properly."<sup>77</sup> Jenkins's life and career challenged overly optimistic accounts of African American life in Paris, which fail to account for the "everyday reality of racism."<sup>78</sup> Jazz historian Andy Fry says even though black Americans experienced less racial violence and hostility; they were still subjected to discrimination and the fact that "black appeal too often relied on exoticist-racist thinking."<sup>79</sup> Jenkins was able to form the Anglo-Continental-American Music Press in September of 1925 and *Afram*, according to one source, had been accepted for production in Paris.<sup>80</sup> But he died suddenly in 1926 from "complications" following an appendectomy. The nation that Gwendolyn Bennett claimed was "compatible with [his] life's work and ambition" was also the nation whose poor medical treatment of people of color likely led to his death.<sup>81</sup>

Despite his early death, Jenkins made an indelible mark on both the black entertainment industry and black concert music world. Take for instance the similarities between Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and Jenkins's *Afram*. In the early 1920s, Jenkins, along

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<sup>75</sup> Edmund Thornton Jenkins to Daniel Joseph Jenkins, 20 April 1926, Box 1, Folder 4, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>76</sup> Stovall, *Pair Noir*; Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre*.

<sup>77</sup> Edmund Thornton Jenkins to Daniel Joseph Jenkins, 20 April 1926.

<sup>78</sup> Andy Fry, *Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Lucien H. White, "Brilliant Musician and Composers Lost to Race in Untimely Death in Paris of Edmund Thornton Jenkins, Sept. 12," *New York Age*, 23 October 1926, Box 1, Folder 9, Edmund T. Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>81</sup> Bennett, 339.

with James P. Johnson and Will Marion Cook, showed the world that Charleston was a black cultural reservoir, worthy of compositional treatment. DuBose Heyward's novel was written in 1925, two years after Jenkins began drafting *Afram*. The Jenkins Orphanage Band—the very same band that trained Edmund Jenkins—performed at the 1927 Broadway iteration of *Porgy*.<sup>82</sup> Rouben Mamoulian, the director, went to Charleston to study the Southern Negro because, as he said, “the only Negro I had intimate knowledge of was the shoeblack in a Rochester hotel.”<sup>83</sup> He discovered the orphanage band and invited them to perform. In addition to these connections, Gershwin and Jenkins were in Paris at the same time. Gershwin was notorious for slumming, Jenkins for frequenting and performing at highbrow venues and clubs in Montmartre.<sup>84</sup> It is possible they crossed paths, but the dearth of surviving materials on black composers during this time makes it impossible to know.

What is certain is that Jenkins's compositional career spanned an important time in the development of concert jazz, and he adopted an insightful perspective on the power of jazz to speak on behalf of the world's black citizens. *Afram* was an imprint of the diasporic experiences of an African American expatriate in Europe at the same time it was a bold solution to “the Jazz Problem.” It confronted disparate representations of race as they intersected with class and nationality. *Afram* signaled a step away from Du Bois's and Locke's somewhat paternalistic view of black folk music and moved towards Hughes's youthful and rebellious embrace of jazz. Hughes warned black Americans against the “urge within the race toward whiteness.” He called it the great racial mountain “standing in the way of any true

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<sup>82</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *“On My Way”: The Untold Story of Rouben Mamoulian, George Gershwin, and Porgy and Bess*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013), 30, 50–51, and 116–117.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>84</sup> Shack, 135.

Negro art in America.”<sup>85</sup> Jenkins departed from more provincial constructions of blackness to create a cosmopolitan style shaped by an experimental genre. Where Africa served as an imaginary playground for many white modernist composers to wax artistic about the deadening effects of modernization, it was, for Jenkins, a vital reconstruction of a black American past upon which the future hinged. Jenkins rejected the cynosure of modernism: primitivist depictions of Africa. He used the continent as a symbol of strength and unity, as an imaginary nation-state whose citizens reveled in choice and mobility, pleasure and freedom. And they did this to the sounds of jazz.

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<sup>85</sup> Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *The Nation*, 23 June 1926, 692.

## Chapter Two: Symphonic Jazz & White Supremacy: John Powell's *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) & the Antimodernist Response to "the Jazz Problem"

John Powell's *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) stands as one of the earliest examples of concert jazz. The *Rhapsodie* was Powell's most experimental composition and his most dissonant rendering of "black music." Prior to this composition, the Virginian composer and concert pianist had established an international reputation with piano works based on southern black and white folk music in *Sonata Virginiaesque* (1906), *In the South* (1906), and *At the Fair* (1907). The *Rhapsodie*, according to Powell, was designed to blend both the "primitive" and "childlike" qualities of the Negro, because he found "the music of oppressed people fascinating."<sup>1</sup> He drew on different representations of blackness including the Spirituals, ragtime rhythms, and early jazz band textures and timbres. As in his prior compositions, they are contextualized within late-Romantic approaches to orchestral scoring, but, in the *Rhapsodie*, Powell makes extensive use of dissonance and interpolation to signal not only modernist concert trends but also what he perceived to be the "noisiness" of black musical culture.

*Rhapsodie nègre* was also one of the most popular examples of concert jazz. It premiered in 1918 by Modest Altschuler's Russian Symphony Orchestra. By the end of the 1920s, it had been performed fifty times. In 1928, Daniel Gregory Mason included Powell's *Rhapsodie* in the top ten works performed most frequently by American orchestras.<sup>2</sup> It sat next to George Gershwin's *Rhapsody* in the hall of canonical symphonic jazz pieces. An obituary of Powell even claimed the *Rhapsodie* influenced George Gershwin.

It is often noted that Powell was among the first contemporary composers to incorporate Negro rhythms in musical works of a classical nature. George Gershwin

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<sup>1</sup> John Powell, "Rhapsodie nègre Program Notes," Manuscripts, Box 29 Folder 9, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, "Our Orchestras and Our Money's Worth," *Harper's*, 1 June 1928, 80–81.

happened to be in the audience once when Powell was performing the “Rhapsodie Nègre.” After the concert, Gershwin rushed backstage. “I wish I could write something like that,” he told Powell. “Well, go head and do it,” Powell said. The result was the now-famous Gershwin “Rhapsody in Blue.”<sup>31</sup>

Like Gershwin’s piece, it refused to be bound by the symphonic jazz vogue of the 1920s; the *Rhapsodie* reached its eighty-second performance in 1939, and the Washington Post declared it “one of the most frequently play of American works.”<sup>4</sup>

*Rhapsodie nègre* marked the last time Powell used representations of blackness in his music. By 1923, he outspokenly opposed what he called the “Negro school” of composition. In an article he wrote for Rice University entitled “Music and the Nation,” Powell claimed that black folksongs were really the “compositions of white men.”<sup>5</sup> The part of black music that is “purely African” is meagre and monotonous, he argued. He conceded to using black music in the past but assured readers “the expression was purely objective, and was frankly intended to be character music.”<sup>6</sup> In 1933, he ballyhooed “There is no real American Negro music” — a statement that caused an uproar in the black press.<sup>7</sup> Powell advanced this position on black music for the rest of his life.

At the same time Powell developed a reactionary stance against black culture, he became a politically active white supremacist. Three years after the *Rhapsodie*’s premiere, one of Powell’s friend, W.C. Maddox, received a telegram from the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, saying he had raised over nine thousand dollars “to put [Powell] out of business in

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<sup>3</sup> Obituary of John Powell, *Daily Press* (Newport News), 23 January 1963, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Hans Kindler, “John Powell Presents Own Rhapsody Here,” *The Washington Post*, 29 January 1939, News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> John Powell, “Music and the Nation,” *The Rice Institute Pamphlet* 10:3 (July 1923), 148.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Famous Musicians Give Lie to Va. Critic: There is Real Negro Music, Artists Say,” *Afro-American*, 4 February 1933, pg. 11; and “John Powell’s Assertion That There Is No Real American Negro Music Disproved By Eminent Musicians and Critics,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 28 January 1933, pg. 8.

America and in history” (Figure 2.1).<sup>8</sup> Powell’s life was threatened because he had helped dissolve the Richmond branch of the KKK. Like many elite white men, he thought their tactics were too violent and their handling of money, deceptive.<sup>9</sup> Powell wanted to “manage white supremacy,” as historian J. Douglas Smith calls it, but in ways deemed more respectable and civil by his colleagues. They formed the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America. This organization promised to preserve “the supremacy of the white race in the United States of America, *without racial prejudice or hatred*.”<sup>10</sup> Instead of lynching and terrorizing black Americans, they passed laws in support of segregation and led protests against integration. Yet, their scope was far more expansive than the KKK and their impact, towering. Powell’s trademark piece of legislation was The Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which required Virginia citizens to register their race according to the “one-drop” rule. (“One drop of Negro blood makes the Negro.”<sup>11</sup>) The law was used to support the passing of *Buck v. Bell*, a Supreme Court ruling which led to the forced sterilization of thousands of “unfit” individuals in the United States for decades as well as the sterilization of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Nazi Germany.

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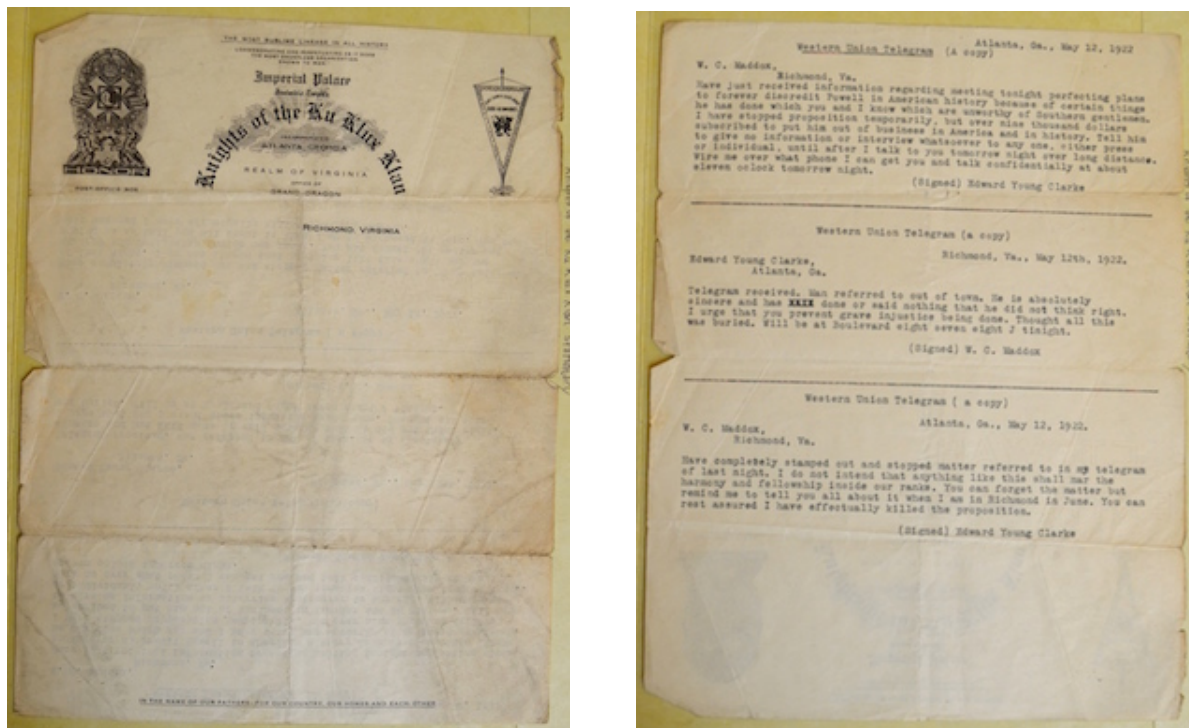
<sup>8</sup> The Imperial Wizard referred to the member of the highest ranking order of the Ku Klux Klan. Edward Young Clarke and W. C. Maddox, 12 May 1922, Correspondence Concerning Eugenics, Box 39 Folder 8, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>9</sup> According to historian J. Douglas Smith, “Dr. Lawrence T. Price, W. C. Maddox, and W. I. Stockton, Jr., respectively the chairman, president, and secretary of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs, all appeared in the notarized list of former Richmond Klansmen who had renounced their membership.” For more on the formation of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, see: J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 77–80.

<sup>10</sup> “Constitution of the Anglo-Saxon Club of America,” Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, 1923, pg. 2, Articles on Eugenics, Box 38 Folder 6, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia; emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> John Powell, “Is White America to Become a Negroid Nation?” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 22 July 1923, Sunday Magazine, 2, cited in Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 82.

Figure 2.1. Telegram Correspondence between Edward Young Clarke and W.C. Maddox of the Ku Klux Klan, 12 May 1922



Whereas the jazz explosion pushed Edmund Jenkins to the vanguard of U.S. concert music traditions, it incited Powell to take a reactionary stance not only on “the Jazz Problem” but also on “the Negro Problem.”<sup>12</sup> Despite his change of opinion on the validity of black music, he performed the *Rhapsodie* regularly. Virginia’s most prominent white supremacist had become famous for his black music. The anti-miscegenist, famous for hybridity.

In this chapter, I argue that the *Rhapsodie*’s distinct representations of blackness were both a portent symbol of Powell’s ultimate rejection of and hatred for black culture as well as part and parcel of the dialectical languages of modernism. The *Rhapsodie* was a piece of white supremacist propaganda as much as it was an assemblage of the sounds of the banal racism

<sup>12</sup> J. Lester Feder, “Unequal Temperament: The Somatic Acoustics of Racial Difference in the Symphonic Music of John Powell,” *Black Music Research Journal* 28:1 (Spring 2008): 18.

that fueled modernist innovation. The composition refracts such multiplicity because it was an extension of two different conversations about American concert music, brewing in the 1910s: 1) the development of U.S. concert traditions based on indigenous folk music, and 2) primitivism, an early twentieth-century modernist art movement. Both of these languages engaged directly with the high/low and black/white dichotomies, especially as they intersected one another. The first set of discourses was designed to preserve and uplift vernacular culture by placing it in high art contexts. To forge concert music tradition distinct from Europe, these composers based their music on racialized music of Native Americans and African Americans. The second set of discourses was intended to disrupt the high/low divide altogether by using shocking representations of racialized music by so-called primitives. The compositions that came out of these movements were important precursors to the Symphonic Jazz Era.

I discuss these two trends in concert music below and then show how Powell's *Rhapsodie* used these compositional languages. Powell used certain representations of blackness to depict what he thought were the regressive characteristics of African Americans. His development of themes delineated a social Darwinist narrative in which black Americans are incapable of progress. Though the *Rhapsodie* was written at a time when Powell's extremist ideologies were still in formation, the composition bears the traces of white supremacy. I conclude by fleshing out the contradiction between his extreme political and musical response to "the Jazz Problem" and his performance of a composition, inspired by black vernacular music. The *Rhapsodie*'s reception shows that as problematic as his depictions of black culture were, they were also an integral part of the concert jazz tradition. Audiences heard it in dialogue with other compositions such as Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), John Alden Carpenter's *Skyscrapers* (1926), and Aaron Copland's Piano Concerto (1926). They heard it as modernist.



## Blackness & “The Dvorak Debates”

Powell's *Rhapsodie* is an extension of a pre-existing conversation among composers about the use of folk music to develop a unique body of American composition. Powell was studying piano and composition at the University of Virginia when debates about this topic grew louder.<sup>13</sup> At the turn-of-the-century, the United States was coming of age as a musical nation. To be taken seriously, U.S. composers felt they had to offer something different from European concert music, which still dominated their concert halls. The idea of appropriating African American vernacular music shaped this conversation. Dvořák's voice was the loudest, and his publications from 1892—1895 while director of the National Conservatory ignited what musicologist Beth Levy calls “the Dvořák debates.”<sup>14</sup> After working with his student Harry T. Burleigh, who sang and transcribed Spirituals, Dvořák declared “that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies.”<sup>15</sup> This controversial statement divided composers in Jim Crow America for decades to come.

Henry Gilbert, student of Edward MacDowell, was a devout follower of Dvorak's edict. He used the Spirituals in *Negro Episode* (1896) and was one of the first composers to use ragtime in his 1911 *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes*.<sup>16</sup> *The Dance in Place Congo* (1908) was

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the development of American concert music, see: Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Barbara L. Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 68—126; Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3—87; and Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Beth Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2—6. Also see: Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*, 56—86. For more on Dvořák's impact on American concert music, see: Richard Crawford, “Dvořák and the Historiography of American Music,” in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David Beveridge, 257—264 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Thomas L. Riis, “Dvořák and his Black Students,” in *Rethinking Dvořák*, 265—274.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Charles Hamm, “Dvořák, Nationalism, Myth, and Racism,” in *Rethinking Dvořák*, 278. Also see: Antonín Dvořák, “Music in America,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (February 1895): 429—434.

<sup>16</sup> *Negro Episode* uses rhythms from *Slave Songs of the United States* and quotes “Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord!” See: Sherrill V. Martin, *Henry F. Gilbert: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 7. Charles Ives used ragtime earlier in his *Four Ragtime Pieces*, but they were never performed. See: Charles Hiroshi Garrett,

rejected for being “niggah music” but recast as a ballet by the Metropolitan Opera Company in 1918.<sup>17</sup> He was ahead of his time, and he laid the foundation for early uses of jazz—like that in Powell’s *Rhapsodie*—as well as the Symphonic Jazz vogue.

Powell also based his early compositions on indigenous music or what were sometimes called “Americanisms.”<sup>18</sup> After studying at the University of Virginia, Powell moved to Vienna to study composition under Theodor Leschetizky and Karel Navrátil. He made his debut in Berlin in 1907 and toured Paris, London, and Vienna thereafter. His early compositions used an amalgam of Southern folk tunes. “Negro Elegy” of *In the South* (1906) intimates “plantation songs” with its repetitive and even phrasing and its declamatory hymn-like patterns of the melody and harmony. *At the Fair* (1907) features the “Banjo-Picker” and mimics the rapid hand techniques of a banjo player, and *Sonata Virginianesque* (1906) depicts Virginia plantation life before the Civil War.<sup>19</sup> Powell used nostalgic representations of black sound based on white supremacist stereotypes of black slaves, while Gilbert turned to black contemporary dance music. Despite Powell’s insistence on slave life as the primary frame with which to represent black music, his works were understood in relation to the increasing prevalence of blackness in art. *The Crisis*, for example, noted Powell’s “interest in the Negro idiom” in the same column they advertised a Roland Hayes recital and discussed Charles Wakefield Cadman’s use of ragtime in his Piano Trio, op. 56.<sup>20</sup>

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*Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 17–47. *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* premiered in 1911 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert F. Peyser, “Negro Rhapsody by Gilbert Approved,” *Musical America* (December 20, 1913): 21, 1; and Helena Maguire, “MacDowell Festival Brings Recognition to Our Composer,” *Musical America* (August 30, 1913).

<sup>18</sup> Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*.

<sup>19</sup> L. Moody Simms, Jr., “Folk Music in America: John Powell and the ‘National Musical Idiom,’” *Journal of Popular Culture* (Winter 1973): 512.

<sup>20</sup> “Music and Art,” *The Crisis* 7:3 (January 1914): 114.

While Henry Gilbert and John Powell based their compositions on black vernacular music, Edward MacDowell and Daniel Gregory Mason spoke out against its use. They used the language of the high/low divide to scrutinize black music. MacDowell said: “if the trademark of nationality is indispensable, which I deny...why cover it with the badge of whilom slavery rather than with the stern but at least manly and free rudeness of the North American Indian?”<sup>21</sup> Mason, a close friend and colleague of Powell, argued that American music did not need “to achieve individuality by idealizing some primitive popular strain.” He was, like MacDowell, especially harsh on black music:

You can make a tune ‘American’ by ‘ragging’ its rhythm, as you can make a story American by inserting ‘I guess’ or ‘I reckon’ at frequent intervals. It often mistakes the conception of the average for that of the ideal type, and supposes that the man in the street represents the best taste of America.<sup>22</sup>

Ragtime, he wrote, was America’s vice not virtue.<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, MacDowell and Mason both experimented with representations of blackness. They justified them as playful excursions. In 1895, MacDowell wrote a peculiar letter to Mason privately admitting what he had done:

I told you that I should commit all manner of loathsome musical sins this summer, you remember? Well, I hereby appoint you my father confessor. I’ve gone and done one silly sin. I got hold of a little tune that seemed to me to be rather ‘nigger’ and I have worked it into a little *Scherzino*. I can imagine your groans and other exhibitions of disgust when you receive it, but just the same I must confess it. I can see the niggers, men and women, dancing under the sway of the fascination of rhythm until the sweat fairly rolls off them, and the little singsong tune goes on and on with monotonous persistency. There, I feel better now.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Zuck, 60. As Levy points out, this statement was made in a lecture he delivered after the popular reception of his Indian suite. See Levy, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, “Folk-Song and American Music (A Plea for the Unpopular Point of View),” *The Musical Quarterly* IV:3 (July 1918): 323.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 324–325.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, *Music in My Time* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 36.

Over twenty years later, Mason composed a String Quartet on Negro Themes (1918). That same year he published an article in *The Musical Quarterly* about “Folk-Song and American Music,” where he wrote that folk music cannot be the basis of a nationalistic style but could be used “now and then for an artistic holiday, as MacDowell has done it in his Indian Suite.” Indian music, he decided, could never represent the “complex American temper.”<sup>25</sup> Mason’s use of the word holiday speaks to the way in which white fantasies of racialized difference were treated like traveling to remote parts of the world—in this case, the Southern part of their own nation. MacDowell and Mason were, to put it one way, “playing in the dark.”<sup>26</sup>

So too was Powell in 1918 with his *Rhapsodie* but his repudiation would come later, and he would strike his gavel much harder, denying the existence of black American music altogether. His “objective character pieces” turned out to be an extended “artistic holiday” lasting from 1906 to 1918, but he disavowed something else in the *Rhapsodie*: its modernism. Powell’s representations of blackness had taken on a much more experimental tone. They signaled the emergence of jazz and the impact of primitivism on U.S. musical modernism.

### Primitivist Modernisms: The *Rhapsodie*’s Dedication & Program Notes

By the 1910s, the conversation about basing concert music on folk traditions had been shaped by a budding European movement called primitivism.<sup>27</sup> If modernism was about rejecting Victorian social norms, if modernism was about searching for authentic experiences in an existence increasingly mediated by technology, if modernism was about processing the psychological toll of a global war, then representations of primitive cultures gave this artistic

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<sup>25</sup> Mason, “Folk-Song and American Music (A Plea for the Unpopular Point of View),” 323.

<sup>26</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Oja, 167.

movement its scaffolding.<sup>28</sup> Primitivist modernism was an art movement fascinated by depictions of “prehistoric” or “African” savages. The symbolic capacity of this imaginary figure gave art an “infusion of energy,” “a mixture of fascination, disgust, and something like terror.”<sup>29</sup> Portraying uncultured subjects with uninhibited urges gave modernists the shocking spirit they were searching for. Igor Stravinsky and Pablo Picasso were among them. African art, brought to Paris museums during French colonial expansion, led to Picasso’s African Period (1906–09). These sculptures, collected and perched in his studio, inspired *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), which supplanted the heads of nude white women with African masks.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Stravinsky explored what he perceived to be the unbridled urges of uncivilized people by turning the orchestra into a giant drum, thumped erratically and brutally. *The Rite of Spring* premiere on May 29, 1913 stands as “one of the most famous episodes in the public’s hostile reaction to modern primitivism.”<sup>31</sup> U.S. composers established their own tradition of this aesthetic. In the 1910s, concert pianists Leo Ornstein and Henry Cowell used tone clusters and extreme ranges to evoke savages. Ornstein’s *Wild Men’s Dance* (1913–1914) is filled with “vehement, unruly rhythm, compounded of dense chord clusters” and “brutal accents.”<sup>32</sup>

Powell’s *Rhapsodie* bears the traces of this movement. In the first half of the 1910s, he toured Europe, and, in the second half, he traveled back and forth between Richmond and

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<sup>28</sup> For more on primitivism, see: Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Michael Bell, “The Metaphysics of Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, edited by Michael Levenson, 9–32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 235.

<sup>30</sup> John Warne Monroe, “Surface Tensions: Empire, Parisian Modernism, and ‘Authenticity’ in African Sculpture, 1917–1939,” *American Historical Review* 117:2 (April 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Rumson, “Leo Ornstein (1892–2002),” in *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde: A Biocritical Sourcebook*, ed. Larry Sitsky (New York: Greenwood, 2002), 352.

New York City, where he encountered the popularity of ragtime and eventually jazz as well as the development of modernist institutions. These experiences pushed his conceptions and appropriations of black music in a different, more radical direction. The *Rhapsodie* is his most cacophonous piece. He used noisy musical signifiers to depict black Americans as barbarous. His incorporation of jazz, albeit brief, amplified these depictions.

Critics heard his primitivist modernism loud and clear. Music critic Lawrence Gilman said its “strikingly puissant and engrossing score” was “memorable for its rhythmic vitality, its imaginative power, and its technical virtuosity.”<sup>33</sup> Olin Downes claimed the “opening wail of the orchestra” had “the whiff and the blackness of the jungle. It is said that a cry of a negro selling watermelons gave Mr. Powell, who is a Southern, his opening motive.”<sup>34</sup>

Though primitive stereotypes of black Americans were most palpable in the music, Powell’s detailed program notes and dedication of the piece to Joseph Conrad secured its association with primitivist modernism. Powell wrote a nearly nine-hundred-word program to delineate exactly how the themes represented primordial impulses. The program’s preface reinforced this belief by linking “the Negro” to what he perceived to be African savagery:

the Negro not merely occupies a subordinate position in the political and social organization of our country, but is, in spite of the surface polish and restraints imposed by close contact with Caucasian civilization, a genuine primitive. His musical utterance when really direct, not imitative, brings with it always the breath of the tropical jungle.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Gilman, *Herald Tribune* (from American Orchestral Society 50th performance), quoted in *Literary Digest*, 16 February 1929, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Olin Downes, “Music,” n.d., *New York Times*, News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia. There is no date on this clipping, but it was written after the fifty-first performance by New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society at Carnegie Hall, which celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the American Society of Arts and Letters.

<sup>35</sup> John Powell, “Rhapsodie nègre Program Notes,” Manuscripts, Box 29 Folder 9, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

Powell mapped each theme onto the actions of his black characters, lending the *Rhapsodie* a programmatic feel (Table 2.1). In these imaginative program notes, rhythms are “suggestive of tom-toms palpitating through the night,” a dance motive is the sonic backdrop of a cannibalistic rite, harmony is “suggestive,” and musical climaxes represent “the frantic frenzy of a Voodoo orgy.” So heavy handed are his descriptions that black composer and music critic Nora Holt, who notably composed her own *Rhapsody on Negro Themes* in 1918, wrote, in her *Chicago Defender* column, that some of these descriptions “out-rhapsodied his rhapsody.”<sup>36</sup> Yet they show his extreme take on U.S. racial hierarchies.

Table 2.1. Excerpts from the program notes of *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) by John Powell

Themes	Descriptions
First	The Rhapsodie opens with a wild, plaintive cry, given out by the wood supported by strings. This motive fades away in a mysterious terror-stricken tremolo and the piano enters with a rhythm suggestive of tomtoms [sic] palpitating through the night.
Second	Above this rhythm is heard in faintest pianissimo, a dance motive, such as might attend a cannibalistic rite. A sinuous passage writhes snake-like up the whole gamut of the piano, accompanied by painting dissonant sighs from the wood wind [sic]
Third (Primary)	“...Wild, plaintive sadness, is now introduced by the piano, unharmonized, above a syncopated organ point. The English horn now takes over the theme, the piano maintaining the syncopations, the strings in tremolo creeping up chromatically through the uncouth harmonies of the muted brass, like some lurking horror approaching and preparing to pounce upon its victim.
Fourth	This theme is a version of the beautiful old hymn, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariots, Coming for to Carry Me Home.” The orchestra now takes over the melody, the piano giving the refrain antiphonally.
Fifth	The theme is developed by the different choirs of the orchestra, the rhythms getting wilder and the harmony more suggestive until the music culminates in a frenetic and barbarous announcement of the dance motive on the piano, revealing the frantic frenzy of a Voodoo orgy, which degenerates into a maniac licentiousness.”

<sup>36</sup> Nora Douglas Holt, “Music,” *The Chicago Defender*, 12 March 1921, 10.

Powell's primitivist narrative resonates with pseudo-scientific discourses that placed black Americans "on the bottom rung of an immutable ladder to civilization."<sup>37</sup> Anthropologist Lee Baker says this social Darwinist perspective permeated anthropological and political writing. It also permeated musical stereotypes. In his program notes, Powell argued that black Americans lack inhibition and restraint and, as a result, have "the physical impulses of the adult human animal to a passionately poignant extent." These pseudo-scientific theories and stereotypes justified Jim Crow racial hierarchies and fueled the eugenics movement of the 1920s, of which Powell was an integral part.

Powell's program notes and music gesture towards primitivist devices, but his dedication of the *Rhapsodie* to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* clinches the deal. The program notes could easily be passages from Conrad's 1899 novel. In *Heart of Darkness*, black-skinned cannibals overwhelm the senses of the story's narrator, Charles Marlow, with their "burst of yells," "whirl of black limbs," and "mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage."<sup>38</sup> Both Powell and Conrad gave their audiences a voyeuristic lens into white imaginaries of African primitivity. However, Powell's came with an agenda rooted in scientific racism. Through his manipulation of the *Rhapsodie*'s themes, Powell constructs a social Darwinian narrative about what he believed was African Americans' inability to become civilized.

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<sup>37</sup> Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 35.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, unabridged, edited by Stanley Applebaum (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 32.



## The Racial Hierarchy of Primitivist Modernism

The *Rhapsodie* has five themes which capture different representations of blackness.<sup>39</sup>

The first, second, and third are generalized references to black music whereas the fourth and fifth are quotations of the Spirituals: “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “I Want to Be Ready.” All of the themes use stereotypes of what was perceived to be the “strangeness” and “noisiness” of black culture (except the quotation of “Swing Low”). For example, the third theme is an eight-measure phrase that plays over a tonic pedal and has the developmental properties of a period (Figure 2.2). It uses a common ragtime pattern in both hands. The melody starts on the fifth note of the chord, creating a sense of ongoing urgency, and descends through a raised fourth all the way to a raised sixth, which then jumps to the tonic instead of passing through a leading tone. The disjunct leaps, unexpected chromaticism, and syncopation construct the musical Otherness of black culture.

Figure 2.2. “Principal Theme,” *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)



<sup>39</sup> John Powell, *Rhapsodie nègre*, 1918, manuscript, 1922, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

Powell created a mercurial soundscape to prescribe racial difference, and he used modernist formal strategies to do so. Juxtaposition and interpolation exist alongside extreme texture and dynamic contrasts. The *Rhapsodie* acts as one large phrase—kept alive by interruptions, evaded cadences, and repetitive development. The first three themes are presented in full, repeated and developed, and then interrupted by a chaotic orchestral soundscape. Designed to represent the inability of African Americans to make social progress, each theme unravels. They are disrupted by radically contrasting material at unpredictable moments. This is most evident in the introduction (Theme 1 and Theme 2), which is a series of interpolations, meandering digressions, and stark juxtapositions. It sounds like incomplete passages clamor for attention. When the second theme (or what Powell calls the “dance motive”) is debuted by the piano, it only makes it six measures before the orchestra erupts in a flurry of disparate material (Figure 2.3). It is initially derivative of the piano solo, but just as soon as it starts, it gets interrupted by a new figure: oscillation between an augmented sixth chord and its resolution to a major chord. These “dissonant sighs from the woodwinds” are layered on top of “a sinuous passage,” which “writhes snake-like up the whole gamut of the piano.” The piano rapidly ascends through a half-diminished chord. This brief, four-measure passage fizzles out and a series of descending thirds in the woodwinds brings the music back to the initial “wild, plaintive cry” of the first theme, starting the cycle all over again. In this extended section are four distinct passages, never fully developed and always interrupted by the subsequent one.

Example 2.3. “Dance Motive,” mm. 9–19, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

**Pf. Solo**  
*accelerando*  
*Alle moderato.*  
*pp*  
*onese:*

**sotto voce**

**Violin I**  
*piu mosso*  
*Alle moderato.*

**Violin II**  
*ppp*

**Viola**  
*ppp*

**Cello**  
*ppp*

**C. Bass**  
*ppp*



soundscape to witness violent urges takeover the savage featured in his program notes. This compositional strategy dominates the composition with the exception of the fourth theme. The *Rhapsodie* contains a dramatic shift in tone at the moment that “Swing Low” enters.

“Swing Low” is introduced almost exactly half way through the piece. Unlike the themes preceding and following, this one uses traditional harmonic progressions, even phrasing, and non-syncopated rhythms. A series of leading tone chords ushers in the consonant section, drenched in musical signifiers associated with white, Protestant hymns (Figure 2.4). The slow tempo, gradual crescendos, moderate texture, and stable transitions between phrases make for a very serene atmosphere in stark opposition to its surroundings. The piano plays the first phrase with the strings, harp, and a horn solo offering an antiphonal response. After a few iterations, the orchestra plays grandly through the heterophonic texture—replete with cymbals crashing and a rumbling timpani to round off balanced phrases and authentic cadences.

Figure 2.4. “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm. 148—154, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

a tempo ♩ = 52

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
C. Bass

Con sord.  
p  
Sord.  
p  
Con sord.  
p  
Con sord.  
p  
Sord.  
p

The program notes for this theme switch to a more amicable and didactic tone when introducing this theme. Gone are the racist characterizations of the “dance motive” or the “wild, plaintive cry.” This is because Powell believed African American Spirituals were imitations of white, rural camp songs. Powell would write about this more formally in the 1920s and 1930s, and so too would his colleague, George Pullen Jackson, in his 1938 book, *White Spirituals of the Southern Uplands*. In it, Jackson painstakingly traces the purported white origin of numerous black Spirituals. The success of black music posed such a threat to Jackson and Powell they questioned its very ontology. Although “Swing Low” was famously recorded by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1909 and by this time was a well-known black Spiritual, Powell used it to represent the desire of black Americans to assimilate. However, as the theme unravels and the soundscape grows discordant, Powell reinforced his belief that this was a biological impossibility.

“Swing Low” has several interruptions. Just as the repeat of the theme’s first statement comes to a close, the antiphonal phrases, played by the piano and celeste, are subtly infused with chromatic passing tones, signaling the impending degradation of the theme. Directly following is the melody’s first disturbance, what Powell describes as an “interruption of the wailing motive” (Figure 2.4). Short, two-measure fragments travel through various instruments—violin, oboe, French horn, and clarinet—and yield a dense texture as they overlap and rapidly modulate. The strings tremolo a Tristan chord over a rolling percussion section. This ominous soundscape is abruptly interrupted by a shift towards a chimerical almost enchanting mood. The celesta, harp, and piano quietly yet rapidly arpeggiate through non-functional chords. The piano then creates dominant suspension in its sixteenth-note outline of the D-flat dominant seventh chord in sixty-fourth notes with an ornamental gesture

wavering between E-flat, E-double-flat, and D-flat. The melody returns in full orchestral garb topped with the whimsical tinkles of the celesta.

Figure 2.5. First Interruption of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm.164—172, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

This musical score page contains measures 164 through 172 of the piece. The score is written for a large orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Fl.** (Flute): Measures 164-172, starting with a *p* dynamic.
- Picc.** (Piccolo): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Ob.** (Oboe): Measures 164-172, featuring a melodic line starting in measure 165.
- E. Hn.** (English Horn): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- B♭ Cl.** (B-flat Clarinet): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Bsn.** (Bassoon): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Hn. 1** (Horn 1): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Hn. 2** (Horn 2): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- B♭ Tpt.** (B-flat Trumpet): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Tbn. 1** (Trombone 1): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Tbn. 2** (Trombone 2): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Timp.** (Timpani): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Perc. 1** (Percussion 1): Measures 164-172, includes a Snare Drum part starting in measure 165.
- Perc. 2** (Percussion 2): Measures 164-172, includes a Bass Drum part starting in measure 165.
- Mallet 1**: Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Hp.** (Harp): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Pno. 2** (Piano 2): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Vin. I** (Violin I): Measures 164-172, starting with a *pp* dynamic.
- Vin. II** (Violin II): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Vla.** (Viola): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.
- Cb.** (Cello): Measures 164-172, mostly rests.

The score is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first system (measures 164-172) is marked with a circled 14. The second system (measures 173-178) is marked with a circled 15. The third system (measures 179-184) is marked with a circled 16. The fourth system (measures 185-190) is marked with a circled 17. The fifth system (measures 191-196) is marked with a circled 18. The sixth system (measures 197-202) is marked with a circled 19. The seventh system (measures 203-208) is marked with a circled 20. The eighth system (measures 209-214) is marked with a circled 21. The ninth system (measures 215-220) is marked with a circled 22. The tenth system (measures 221-226) is marked with a circled 23. The eleventh system (measures 227-232) is marked with a circled 24. The twelfth system (measures 233-238) is marked with a circled 25. The thirteenth system (measures 239-244) is marked with a circled 26. The fourteenth system (measures 245-250) is marked with a circled 27. The fifteenth system (measures 251-256) is marked with a circled 28. The sixteenth system (measures 257-262) is marked with a circled 29. The seventeenth system (measures 263-268) is marked with a circled 30. The eighteenth system (measures 269-274) is marked with a circled 31. The nineteenth system (measures 275-280) is marked with a circled 32. The twentieth system (measures 281-286) is marked with a circled 33. The twenty-first system (measures 287-292) is marked with a circled 34. The twenty-second system (measures 293-298) is marked with a circled 35. The twenty-third system (measures 299-304) is marked with a circled 36. The twenty-fourth system (measures 305-310) is marked with a circled 37. The twenty-fifth system (measures 311-316) is marked with a circled 38. The twenty-sixth system (measures 317-322) is marked with a circled 39. The twenty-seventh system (measures 323-328) is marked with a circled 40. The twenty-eighth system (measures 329-334) is marked with a circled 41. The twenty-ninth system (measures 335-340) is marked with a circled 42. The thirtieth system (measures 341-346) is marked with a circled 43. The thirty-first system (measures 347-352) is marked with a circled 44. The thirty-second system (measures 353-358) is marked with a circled 45. The thirty-third system (measures 359-364) is marked with a circled 46. The thirty-fourth system (measures 365-370) is marked with a circled 47. The thirty-fifth system (measures 371-376) is marked with a circled 48. The thirty-sixth system (measures 377-382) is marked with a circled 49. The thirty-seventh system (measures 383-388) is marked with a circled 50. The thirty-eighth system (measures 389-394) is marked with a circled 51. The thirty-ninth system (measures 395-400) is marked with a circled 52. The fortieth system (measures 401-406) is marked with a circled 53. The forty-first system (measures 407-412) is marked with a circled 54. The forty-second system (measures 413-418) is marked with a circled 55. The forty-third system (measures 419-424) is marked with a circled 56. The forty-fourth system (measures 425-430) is marked with a circled 57. The forty-fifth system (measures 431-436) is marked with a circled 58. The forty-sixth system (measures 437-442) is marked with a circled 59. The forty-seventh system (measures 443-448) is marked with a circled 60. The forty-eighth system (measures 449-454) is marked with a circled 61. The forty-ninth system (measures 455-460) is marked with a circled 62. The fiftieth system (measures 461-466) is marked with a circled 63. The fifty-first system (measures 467-472) is marked with a circled 64. The fifty-second system (measures 473-478) is marked with a circled 65. The fifty-third system (measures 479-484) is marked with a circled 66. The fifty-fourth system (measures 485-490) is marked with a circled 67. The fifty-fifth system (measures 491-496) is marked with a circled 68. The fifty-sixth system (measures 497-502) is marked with a circled 69. The fifty-seventh system (measures 503-508) is marked with a circled 70. The fifty-eighth system (measures 509-514) is marked with a circled 71. The fifty-ninth system (measures 515-520) is marked with a circled 72. The sixtieth system (measures 521-526) is marked with a circled 73. The sixty-first system (measures 527-532) is marked with a circled 74. The sixty-second system (measures 533-538) is marked with a circled 75. The sixty-third system (measures 539-544) is marked with a circled 76. The sixty-fourth system (measures 545-550) is marked with a circled 77. The sixty-fifth system (measures 551-556) is marked with a circled 78. The sixty-sixth system (measures 557-562) is marked with a circled 79. The sixty-seventh system (measures 563-568) is marked with a circled 80. The sixty-eighth system (measures 569-574) is marked with a circled 81. The sixty-ninth system (measures 575-580) is marked with a circled 82. The seventieth system (measures 581-586) is marked with a circled 83. The seventy-first system (measures 587-592) is marked with a circled 84. The seventy-second system (measures 593-598) is marked with a circled 85. The seventy-third system (measures 599-604) is marked with a circled 86. The seventy-fourth system (measures 605-610) is marked with a circled 87. The seventy-fifth system (measures 611-616) is marked with a circled 88. The seventy-sixth system (measures 617-622) is marked with a circled 89. The seventy-seventh system (measures 623-628) is marked with a circled 90. The seventy-eighth system (measures 629-634) is marked with a circled 91. The seventy-ninth system (measures 635-640) is marked with a circled 92. The eightieth system (measures 641-646) is marked with a circled 93. The eighty-first system (measures 647-652) is marked with a circled 94. The eighty-second system (measures 653-658) is marked with a circled 95. The eighty-third system (measures 659-664) is marked with a circled 96. The eighty-fourth system (measures 665-670) is marked with a circled 97. The eighty-fifth system (measures 671-676) is marked with a circled 98. The eighty-sixth system (measures 677-682) is marked with a circled 99. The eighty-seventh system (measures 683-688) is marked with a circled 100. The eighty-eighth system (measures 689-694) is marked with a circled 101. The eighty-ninth system (measures 695-700) is marked with a circled 102. The ninetieth system (measures 701-706) is marked with a circled 103. The hundredth system (measures 707-712) is marked with a circled 104. The hundred-first system (measures 713-718) is marked with a circled 105. The hundred-second system (measures 719-724) is marked with a circled 106. The hundred-third system (measures 725-730) is marked with a circled 107. The hundred-fourth system (measures 731-736) is marked with a circled 108. The hundred-fifth system (measures 737-742) is marked with a circled 109. The hundred-sixth system (measures 743-748) is marked with a circled 110. The hundred-seventh system (measures 749-754) is marked with a circled 111. The hundred-eighth system (measures 755-760) is marked with a circled 112. The hundred-ninth system (measures 761-766) is marked with a circled 113. The hundred-tieth system (measures 767-772) is marked with a circled 114. The hundred-first system (measures 773-778) is marked with a circled 115. The hundred-second system (measures 779-784) is marked with a circled 116. The hundred-third system (measures 785-790) is marked with a circled 117. The hundred-fourth system (measures 791-796) is marked with a circled 118. The hundred-fifth system (measures 797-802) is marked with a circled 119. The hundred-sixth system (measures 803-808) is marked with a circled 120. The hundred-seventh system (measures 809-814) is marked with a circled 121. The hundred-eighth system (measures 815-820) is marked with a circled 122. The hundred-ninth system (measures 821-826) is marked with a circled 123. The hundred-tieth system (measures 827-832) is marked with a circled 124. The hundred-first system (measures 833-838) is marked with a circled 125. The hundred-second system (measures 839-844) is marked with a circled 126. The hundred-third system (measures 845-850) is marked with a circled 127. The hundred-fourth system (measures 851-856) is marked with a circled 128. The hundred-fifth system (measures 857-862) is marked with a circled 129. The hundred-sixth system (measures 863-868) is marked with a circled 130. The hundred-seventh system (measures 869-874) is marked with a circled 131. The hundred-eighth system (measures 875-880) is marked with a circled 132. The hundred-ninth system (measures 881-886) is marked with a circled 133. The hundred-tieth system (measures 887-892) is marked with a circled 134. The hundred-first system (measures 893-898) is marked with a circled 135. The hundred-second system (measures 899-904) is marked with a circled 136. The hundred-third system (measures 905-910) is marked with a circled 137. The hundred-fourth system (measures 911-916) is marked with a circled 138. The hundred-fifth system (measures 917-922) is marked with a circled 139. The hundred-sixth system (measures 923-928) is marked with a circled 140. The hundred-seventh system (measures 929-934) is marked with a circled 141. The hundred-eighth system (measures 935-940) is marked with a circled 142. The hundred-ninth system (measures 941-946) is marked with a circled 143. The hundred-tieth system (measures 947-952) is marked with a circled 144. The hundred-first system (measures 953-958) is marked with a circled 145. The hundred-second system (measures 959-964) is marked with a circled 146. The hundred-third system (measures 965-970) is marked with a circled 147. The hundred-fourth system (measures 971-976) is marked with a circled 148. The hundred-fifth system (measures 977-982) is marked with a circled 149. The hundred-sixth system (measures 983-988) is marked with a circled 150. The hundred-seventh system (measures 989-994) is marked with a circled 151. The hundred-eighth system (measures 995-1000) is marked with a circled 152.

Before long the melody, played by the strings, is interrupted again by the piano with a dissonant tritone variation of the melody (Figure 2.6). This is the second disruption which keeps “Swing Low” from being fully articulated. It leads to large-scale climax based on the development of the introductory dance motive brimming with repetitive melodic fragments, tempestuous harmonies, and dynamic and textural augmentation as the tempo accelerates over time. With full orchestra in tow and a dominant preparation building up tension, the primary theme bursts in, as if finally unleashed. In unison, the woodwinds and strings render the melody unsyncopated and the horns offer more conventional harmonic support. Its declamatory rhythms and hollow texture call forth a pastoral trope, but the piano works diligently to disrupt any serenity, moving, in triplets, up and down the Hungarian minor and chromatic scales. Like all the other themes, the return of the primary theme also breaks down into uninterpretable musical fragments. The once stable harmonic support of the horns transforms into quartal harmonies. Over this series of tritones, the tempo hastens and anything that can rumble and tremolo does. The texture breaks down into frantic utterances of various woodwind instruments, rapidly modulating and interrupting one another, until the drums and horns take over, beating out sixteenth notes a diminished fourth from the primary theme’s tonic. The melody ends.



Figure 2.6. Second Interruption of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm181 – 182, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

The musical score for measures 181 and 182 of *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) shows a second interruption of the "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" theme. The score is written for Piano Solo (Pf. Solo), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and C. Bass. The Piano Solo part is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a "8va" (octave up) instruction. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and C. Bass) are marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a "tutti" instruction. The score shows a complex interplay of rhythms and dynamics, with the piano part featuring a prominent melody and the string parts providing a harmonic and rhythmic foundation. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats).

Yet, this is not the first time “Swing Low” has appeared in the composition nor is it the last. It is foreshadowed twice in the development of the first and second themes, which appear subsequently. It is when the dance motive and principle theme (as discussed above) start to disintegrate that these abbreviated “Swing Low” quotations occur (Figures 2.7 & 2.8). In both cases, the melody is hard to detect. In the first example, the horns belt out the melody but only for two measures. In the second example, the quotation is obscured by the polytonality its appearance in a different key creates, and it is buried by the piano’s ostentatious displays. These earlier references signify attempts, albeit failed ones, at imitating white camp songs.

Figure 2.7. First Quotation of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm. 66–73, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

This musical score page contains the orchestration for measures 66 through 73 of the first quotation of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" from Maurice Ravel's *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918). The score is written for a large orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Flute**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Piccolo**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Oboe**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- English Horn**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Clarinet in B $\flat$** : Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Bassoon**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Horn in F 1**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Horn in F 2**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Trumpet in B $\flat$** : Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Trombone 1**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Trombone 2**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Timpani**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Percussion 1**: Rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Percussion 2**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Mallet Percussion 1**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Harp**: Rests throughout the passage.
- Piano 2**: Complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and left hand.
- Violin I**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Violin II**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Viola**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Cello**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.
- Contrabass**: Melodic line with grace notes and slurs.

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, grace notes, and dynamic markings like *dim.* (diminuendo) and *pizz.* (pizzicato).

Fl. *5* *(8<sup>va</sup>)* *rall*  
 Picc.  
 Ob. *mf*  
 E. Hn. *p*  
 B♭ Cl. *p*  
 Bsn. *p*  
 Hn. 1 *Con sord.*  
 Hn. 2 *Con sord.*  
 B♭ Tpt. *Con sord.*  
 Tbn. 1  
 Tbn. 2  
 Timp. *pp*  
 Perc. 1 *Bass Drum*  
 Perc. 2  
 Mallet 1  
 Hp.  
 Pno. 2 *8<sup>va</sup>*  
 Vln. I *5* *(8<sup>va</sup>)* *Con sord.* *rall*  
 Vln. II *Con sord.* *dim.*  
 Vla. *Con sord.* *dim.*  
 Vc. *Con sord.* *dim.*  
 Cb. *Con sord.* *dim.*

Figure 2.8. Second Quotation of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm. 121 – 127 *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

This musical score page contains measures 121 through 127 of the second quotation of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" from Maurice Ravel's *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918). The score is written for a large orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Fl.** (Flute): Measures 121-122 are rests; measure 123 has a forte (*f*) melodic line; measure 124 is a rest.
- Picc.** (Piccolo): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Ob.** (Oboe): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- E. Hn.** (English Horn): Measures 121-122 are rests; measure 123 has a mezzo-piano (*mp*) melodic line; measure 124 is a rest.
- Bs. Cl.** (Bass Clarinet): Measures 121-122 have a piano (*p*) melodic line; measure 123 has a forte (*f*) melodic line; measure 124 is a rest.
- Bsn.** (Bassoon): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Hn. 1** (Horn 1): Measures 121-124 have a piano (*p*) melodic line.
- Hn. 2** (Horn 2): Measures 121-124 have a piano (*p*) melodic line.
- Bs. Tpt.** (Bass Trombone): Measures 121-124 have a fortissimo (*ff*) chordal accompaniment.
- Tbn. 1** (Trombone 1): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Tbn. 2** (Trombone 2): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Timp.** (Timpani): Measures 121-122 are rests; measure 123 has a piano (*p*) melodic line; measure 124 is a rest.
- Perc. 1** (Percussion 1): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Perc. 2** (Percussion 2): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Mallet 1** (Mallet 1): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Hp.** (Harp): Measures 121-124 are rests.
- Pno. 2** (Piano 2): Measures 121-124 have a complex chordal accompaniment.
- Vln. I** (Violin I): Measures 121-122 are rests; measure 123 has a piano (*p*) melodic line; measure 124 has a pizzicato (*pizz.*) melodic line.
- Vln. II** (Violin II): Measures 121-124 have a pizzicato (*pizz.*) melodic line.
- Vla.** (Viola): Measures 121-124 have a pizzicato (*pizz.*) melodic line.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Measures 121-124 have a piano (*p*) melodic line.
- Cb.** (Contrabass): Measures 121-124 have a piano (*p*) melodic line.

10 *accel.*

Fl.

Picc.

Ob.

E. Hn.

Bs. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

Bs. Tpt.

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Mallet 1

Hp.

Pno. 2

10 *accel.*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*mf*

*f*

*p*

*Con sord.*

*cantabile*

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*

“Swing Low” emerges one final time in the *Rhapsodie*’s conclusion. The final theme is introduced, not without several interruptions from earlier themes. It is also a spiritual, called “I Want to Be Ready,” but it is not given the same consonant backdrop as “Swing Low.” After two to three minutes of development, the melody enters again, replete with ragtime tricks and turns. This “flood of madness,” as Powell calls it in the program notes, is interrupted by “Swing Low.” Indeed, the melody breaks through but it is stated quickly, making its rhythms sound robotic (Figure 2.9). The piano, interrupting the full orchestra, performs the rest of the phrase alone and in an improvisatory manner. Even though it is just a series of rolled chords, the section is marked as a cadenza on the score. The effect is halting, but it does not last long. Just as the piano drags out the final cadence, setting up and sustaining the dominant for four long measures, the orchestra interrupts sweeping the piano up into a rousing return of the primary theme, bringing the *Rhapsodie* to a close. In fitting with his views on racial evolution, Powell, in his program notes, wrote that the melody fails to cadence because it is “incapable of maintaining itself and is overwhelmed in a flood of primal sensuality.”

Figure 2.9. Final Quotation of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” mm. 437–447, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)

36

Fl.

Picc.

Ob.

E. Hn.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Xylophone

Celeste

Mallet 1

Hp.

Pno. 2

8va

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.





Powell used music to construct an evolutionary narrative. He believed culture was the DNA running through your veins. If the spirituals were a white imitation, black Americans, in his view, could never fully internalize this “civilized” cultural expression. Given Powell was theorizing about racial evolution in large-scale compositions as early as 1918, it is perhaps felicitous that post-war challenges to Jim Crow segregation and the blistering success of jazz would propel him into a full-scale legal and cultural battle to preserve white supremacy.

### Jazz & the Sexual Excess of the Primitive

Like Edmund Jenkins, Powell used jazz moderately and restricted it to a short section at the end of his composition. However, he used jazz not to signal black modernity but to bolster stereotypes of black Americans as sexually unhinged. Jazz enhanced his primitivist aesthetic. Jazz, more than the Spirituals, ragtime, and the coon songs before it, had primitive associations already. By the 1920s, rhythm had become “the essential quality of black sound,” according to Ronald Radano.<sup>40</sup> He argues that it was the latest “signature of difference” intended to distance black culture from white culture. Jazz, then, was the sound of the primitive Other, revealing itself “in the undulating rhythms of blacks that connected to a savage debased nature.”<sup>41</sup> Jazz-based classical music composers exploited this conception of jazz to fasten their works to the modernist movement. U.S. composers did this quite regularly, as we will see in my fourth chapter on George Antheil. Powell’s *Rhapsodie* fits squarely within this tradition.

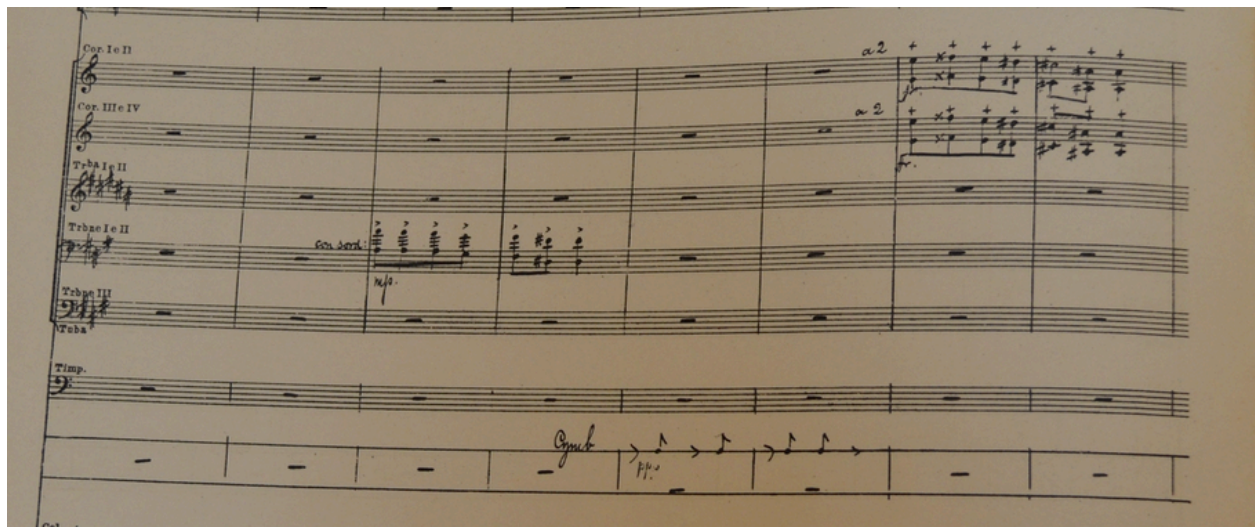
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<sup>40</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 247 and 236.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

Powell references jazz in the final theme and articulates his opinion on where jazz stands in relation to black evolution. The theme is based on the Spiritual “I Want to Be Ready,” and Powell’s program says it is more strongly syncopated than the other themes. Indeed, this Spiritual lacks the white musical robes of “Swing Low,” but it has the most complex harmonic, melodic, and formal development. The AABA passage uses seventh chords and ragtime rhythms. Most interestingly, it features a call and response section (in the second iteration of the A section) with muted horns (Figure 2.10). This moment is by far the most jazz-influenced.

Figure 2.10. Jazz Textures and Timbres in Final Theme, mm. 292–299, *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918)



Source: John Powell, *Rhapsodie nègre*, 1918, manuscript, 1922, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

The program notes take on an erotic tone when describing the final theme. The harmony is “suggestive,” and the music escalates into what he calls a “frantic frenzy of a Voodoo orgy, which degenerates into maniac licentiousness.”<sup>42</sup> Powell used jazz—a word whose etymology was already linked to male ejaculation and unbridled sexual energy—to

<sup>42</sup> John Powell, “Rhapsodie nègre Program Notes,” Manuscripts, Box 29 Folder 9, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

depict his program's uncivilized subjects as lascivious. In the *Rhapsodie*, the Spirituals were an imitation of white civility, whereas jazz embodied the sexual depravity of black-skinned individuals. That Powell placed bombastic allusions to jazz in the middle of quoting a Spiritual merely is another way he articulated his belief in black inferiority.

### Managing "the Negro Problem"

When jazz became mainstream, Edmund Jenkins embraced it as a modernist innovation and a powerful tool for black advancement. Powell, however, disentangled himself from black culture through extreme measures. He doubled down his efforts to construct and preserve Anglo-Saxon culture. Yet, "the Jazz Problem" and "the Negro Problem" were one in the same, for Powell. He believed it was impossible to preserve Anglo-Saxon culture without separating the races, so he spent the better half of the 1920s trying to do just that. To better understand the tension between Powell's political work and his performance of the *Rhapsodie* in the 1920s, I discuss his racial ideologies and white supremacist activism at length below.

Post-war changes in the racial landscape of Virginia led white Americans to "manage white supremacy," to draw on historian J. Douglas Smith once again. In 1916, massive labor shortages in the North caused thousands of black Southerners to migrate North. Factories in Norfolk and Hampton Roads were a closer alternative. In addition, black Virginians moved off of state farms and into cities and towns for work. Smith argues that "tensions mounted as blacks and whites came into ever greater contact and competed for limited municipal resources."<sup>43</sup> White Americans concerned about these challenges to Jim Crow segregation

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41.

sought out cooperation between the races through education and uplift. However, men like Powell took drastic measures to not just “manage” white supremacy but to ensure it.

In two years, Powell established the Anglo-Saxon Clubs and got the Racial Integrity Act passed. Fear mongering was his strategy. To rally members, Powell wrote an article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* in 1923, provocatively titled “Is White America to Become a Negroid Nation?” In it, he warned readers: “Every race that has crossed with the Negro has failed to maintain its civilization and culture,” and “one drop of Negro blood makes the Negro.”<sup>44</sup> By the end of the year the Anglo-Saxon Clubs had accrued four hundred members and established thirty-one posts in the state of Virginia.<sup>45</sup> Powell worked with Earnest Cox, author of *White America*, to draft their legislation which required all citizens to register their race according to the “one-drop” rule. They hired Walter Plecker, the registrar of the newly formed Bureau of Vital Statistics, to harass African Americans they thought were trying to pass. Plecker sent letters threatening to take legal action, dissolve marriages, and expel children from schools. His extreme methods even garnered the attention of famed eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard, who authored *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920). Stoddard praised Plecker for “smoking out the colored gentlemen in the white woodpile.”<sup>46</sup>

Powell and his colleagues believed they had to prevent miscegenation in order to “save the race.”<sup>47</sup> Their work was informed by a pseudo-scientific interpretation of Mendelian

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<sup>44</sup> John Powell, “Is White America to Become a Negroid Nation?” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 22 July 1923, Sunday Magazine, 2, cited in Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> David Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 240–242.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Spiro, 256.

<sup>47</sup> For more on these social Darwinism, which pervaded some strains of ethnology, anthropology, and political writing in the guise of scientific scholarship, see: Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, reprint, with a new introduction by Eric Foner (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2009).

genetics, of which Cox was a student. He studied with America's most famous eugenicist, Madison Grant, who wrote *The Passing of the Great Race* in 1916. Grant was a wildlife conservationist and he thought population control methods should be applied to human beings. Biographer Jonathan Spiro says, "He saw that the inferior races in America were dangerously increasing in numbers, and he exhorted the public to accept the techniques of eugenics to control them."<sup>48</sup> Grant and Cox believed that when "a member of an inferior race mates with a member of a superior race, the result is a reversion to a primitive type."<sup>49</sup> They were intensely focused on black Americans, though. In 1922, Grant founded the American Eugenics Society, and he encouraged Cox to "spearhead the racial integrity law."<sup>50</sup> Cox had an eager colleague, John Powell.

So afraid of the possibility of interracial sex during moments of integration that Powell and Cox aggressively pursued any institution that broke Jim Crow laws. When they found out that the Hampton Institute (an HBCU founded in 1868) was hosting mixed-race events, they erected a branch of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs there. (Notably, he did this just after returning from a U.S. piano concert tour, which included a revival of his *Rhapsodie* after a four-year hiatus.) Powell slandered the institute in print and tried to block its public funding by filing charges with the governor, but to no avail. He helped organize a 300-person protest and drafted the Virginia Public Assemblies Act, "requiring the separation of white and colored persons at public halls, theaters, opera houses, motion picture shows and places of public entertainment and public assemblages."<sup>51</sup> It passed in 1926 and became one of the hundreds of state statutory laws that invigorated the Jim Crow racial order.

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<sup>48</sup> Spiro, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Spiro, 138–139.

<sup>50</sup> Spiro, 253.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

Nonetheless, these men soon discovered that no Jim Crow law could make their vision of racial purity certain. “It is not enough to segregate the Negro on railway trains and street cars, in schools and theaters; it is not enough to restrict his exercise of franchise,” Powell avowed, “so long as the possibility remains of the absorption of Negro blood into our white population.”<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1920s, Powell and Cox worked with Marcus Garvey to expel black Americans from the United States.

In spite of Powell’s and Cox’s prejudice, the three found common objectives between their respective racist agendas and they formed a camaraderie that Cox would call a “spiritual understanding.”<sup>53</sup> They spoke at each other’s gatherings, referenced each other’s writings in their own publications, and worked intimately together to raise money for Garvey’s Black Star Line. It was a shipping line which would transport African Americans to Liberia, bringing the back-to-Africa movement to its fruition. Powell wrote fondly of Garvey: “I realized that I was in the presence of a man of the highest idealism and the noblest courage and the profoundest wisdom; a man dedicated to a noble and a sacred cause—the cause of the independence and integrity of his race.”<sup>54</sup> In the second and 1925 edition of *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Garvey included for free a full-page advertisement of Cox’s *White America*: “Garvey recommended the crude racist tract as an important work that showed that the “Negro Problem...cannot be solved except by separating the races.”<sup>55</sup> Members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association sold 17,000 copies of the book. In support of separatism, one member wrote, “*White America* should be in every Negro’s home along with

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Smith, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914–1940*, Duke University Press, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Speech by John Powell, Liberty Hall, New York, 28 October 1925, in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, edited by Robert A. Hill, vol. VI, September 1924–December 1927 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 254.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Spiro, 260.

the Bible.”<sup>56</sup> When speaking at Garvey’s events, Powell tailored his message and pitched the idea of shipping black Americans back to Africa “as a matter of apologizing for the Middle Passage.”<sup>57</sup> They had been forcibly placed there, and, beyond the façade of his compassionate tone here, Powell wanted them forcibly removed. Their work together ended after Garvey was jailed for fraud and deported to Jamaica in 1927.

Powell’s work in the 1920s had a lasting impact on black Americans. To be sure, The Racial Integrity Act passed the same year of the Johnson-Reed Act, which restricted immigration to 155,000. Nativism and the fear of “alien indigestion,” as historian Mae M. Ngai puts it, “served contemporary prejudices among white Protestant Americans from northern European backgrounds and their desire to maintain social and political dominance.”<sup>58</sup> But Powell, Cox, and Plecker were not concerned with immigrants. Though they initially “placed their efforts within the broader nativist context of the national debate over federal immigration policy,” they very quickly dropped this issue to focus exclusively on “the Negro problem.”<sup>59</sup> Their legal successes shaped race relations in Virginia for decades, but they had a broader and global impact, too. The Racial Integrity Act had a provision which legalized the sexual sterilization of inmates. It was upheld in 1927 Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, which ruled in favor of the compulsory sterilization of “unfit” individuals.<sup>60</sup> This ruling nationally legitimized other sterilization laws and the impact of these are still felt today. *Buck v.*

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<sup>56</sup> Spiro, 260.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 262–263.

<sup>58</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, 80.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 82.

*Bell* was also cited at the Nuremberg trials by lawyers for the Nazi scientists whose actions led to the sterilization of 375,000 Jews.<sup>61</sup>

### An Antimodern Response to “the Jazz Problem”

As a politically active white supremacist, Powell was acutely aware of how threatening the commercial success of black music was, how powerful its impact on black social and economic equality could be. Musical style and racial politics were inextricably linked. Powell’s 1923 essay on American national music drives this point home, as it grapples with both “the Jazz Problem” and “the Negro Problem” in a single publication. It especially reveals his antimodern response to both “problems.”

In order to develop a national culture, America must become a nation, Powell argued. “A nation is not a mere aggregation of human beings, held together by some form of political or governmental organization.” A nation, according to Powell is “a group of people more or less homogenous, having the same blood, possessing common traditions and customs, speaking a common language...”<sup>62</sup> “The Negro Problem,” for Powell, was proof that America was not a nation. It proved that the melting-pot logic prohibited the emergence of a national culture.

If there were no other reason for rejecting this solution of general miscegenation, the negro problem would furnish good and sufficient grounds. If the present ratio were to remain permanent, the inevitable product of the melting-pot would be approximately an octoroon. It should not be necessary to stress the significance of this point. We know that under the Mendelian law the African strain is hereditarily predominant. In other words, one drop of negro blood makes the negro...If we, in America, allow this contamination to proceed unchecked, our civilization is inexorably doomed.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (London: Penguin Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Powell, “Music and the Nation,” 128.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–136.



Without “homogenous blood,” there can be no common traditions. So while segregation, eugenics, and shipping African Americans back to Africa was the permanent solution for Powell, the temporary one was cultural. “Our only hope for a nation in America,” he exhorts, “lies in grafting the stock of our culture on the Anglo-Saxon root.”<sup>64</sup>

Race could not be defined in absolute terms, as Powell would discover over and over again trying to enforce the one-drop rule. Music offered him this possibility. In this same essay, he dismissed compositional approaches that challenged Anglo-Saxon musical purity, saving his most virulent attacks for the “Negro School,” “Popular Music School,” and “Ultra-Modern School.”<sup>65</sup> (Ironically, it is precisely this trifecta his *Rhapsodie* would come to represent in the 1920s.) The Anglo-Saxon school was superior:

For perfection of line and richness of color, the beauty of Anglo-Saxon folk-music surpasses any other in the whole world...For this music is not only marvelous in content, but, even from the purely technical and formal side, it often attains a perfection rarely achieved even by composers of the most surpassing genius.<sup>66</sup>

It was not only superior; it was “the solution” to the problem. While talking about this *cultural* solution Powell adopted the racist lingo of many white supremacists in the early twentieth century:

But, above all, familiarity with this noble inheritance would revive and confirm in ourselves those traditions and feelings which are the crown of our race, and make possible for us, not merely the inauguration of a Golden Age of National Art, but assure to us as well that supremest glory, a nationhood, unparalleled in the annals of all time.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>65</sup> Ultra-modernism was a term used by some American modernists including Henry Cowell, Edgard Varèse, and Ruth Crawford. It was used to denote a more radical and avant-garde approach to composition than other U.S. concert music traditions. For more on this movement, see: Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Powell, “Music and the Nation,” 160.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 163.

Given the severity of this tone, it is no surprise that Powell worked tirelessly until his death in 1963 to construct and preserve this tradition.<sup>68</sup> As State Director of the Federal Music Project, he helped create the White Top Folk Festival (1931–1939). It featured harmonica, fiddle, and banjo contests; performances by touring groups such as George Pullen Jackson’s Old Harp Singers; Sword and Morris dances; and multi-day conferences about the history of Anglo-Saxon folk music leading up to the festival.<sup>69</sup> His 1945 *Symphony in A major*, the *Virginia Symphony*, was a culmination of this logic. It is constructed on Virginia ballads and fiddle tunes that he encountered at the festival and while collecting Anglo-Saxon folk songs.<sup>70</sup>

Powell’s response to “The Jazz Problem” is an antimodern one. Antimodernism, according to historian T.J. Jackson Lears, is “the recoil from an “over civilized” modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual experience supposedly embodied in medieval or Oriental cultures.”<sup>71</sup> Antimodernists rejected industrialization and consumption in exchange for what they thought were more meaningful and authentic experiences. This reactionary movement was led by “old-stock protestant[s]” or “the moral and intellectual leaders of the American WASP bourgeoisie,” as Lears refers to them.<sup>72</sup> Race was fundamental to this stance, and radical changes in race—changes that both symbolized and were a result of modernity after the Great War—led people to protest modern culture. Like these antimodernists, Powell parried jazz, popular culture, and ultra-modernism. He touted an Anglo-Saxon past as a vital cultural expression of America.

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<sup>68</sup> Whisnant, 183–252.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 226–245.

<sup>70</sup> Feder, 40–49.

<sup>71</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xiii.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., xiv.

By the early 1920s, Powell had shifted his position on the modernist dichotomies from black to white music and from present to past traditions, while still finding value in vernacular culture. However, there are similarities between Powell's use of primitivist musical language in the *Rhapsodie* and his antimodernist stance, which crystallized three years later. Lears says modernism (the art and literary movement) and antimodernism "share common roots in the *fin-de-siecle* yearning for authentic experience—physical, emotional, or spiritual." "Superficially at odds," he argues, they are "brothers under the skin."<sup>73</sup> The *Rhapsodie*'s unique representations of blackness were, in essence, a portent symbol of his ultimate rejection of and hatred for black culture.

### A White Supremacist & Symphonic Jazz

When Powell wrote the *Rhapsodie* he already possessed the racist beliefs that post-war racial changes propelled into political action. Archival records indicate that as early as 1916 he was discussing theories of racial purity.<sup>74</sup> The *Rhapsodie*, then, could be seen as a prophecy of his ensuing political career. Picking up the cause of white supremacy in 1922, Powell revealed the extent to which he believed musical style and racial purity were interdependent.

However, Powell continued to perform the *Rhapsodie* even as a spokesperson for the Anglo-Saxon Clubs and white racial integrity, more broadly. The *New York Times* obituary of John Powell hints at what might have been perceived as a dissonance between his politics and his most performed composition:

Mr. Powell was a chief sponsor of Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which barred the marriage of a white person and a person having any Negro blood or as

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>74</sup> Unidentified letter to John Powell, 3 May 1916, Correspondence Concerning Eugenics, Box 39, Folder 1, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

much as one-sixth Indian blood. But he made liberal use of Negro themes in his music, including one of his most successful works, 'Rhapsodie Negre.'<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, while on the West Coast touring in 1925, he pushed his cause—"the problem of negro amalgamation"—and tried to establish a few branches of the Anglo-Saxon Club, according to one article.<sup>76</sup> That very same year Powell joined the Board of Censors to suppress any films that depicted blacks outside of racial stereotypes. Oscar Micheaux's *The House Behind the Cedars*—a film about a mulatto woman who passes and almost marries a white man—was one of these films. The Anglo-Saxon Clubs threatened Micheaux until he agreed to make the changes they wanted.<sup>77</sup> In essence, representations of blackness were fine so long as they fulfilled the racist stereotypes necessary to community America's racial hierarchy and ultimately, to underpin the logic behind eugenics laws.

Amidst his fanatical work, Powell performed his *Rhapsodie* upwards of fifty times. After the unexampled success of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, Powell revived it and toured the United States. Powell's increasing recognition in the world of symphonic jazz led Paul Whiteman to claim the two were working together on a piece in his 1924-25 souvenir program, despite any extant evidence of that fact.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the 1920s, the *Rhapsodie* had been performed fifty times. It received its eightieth performance in 1938 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. One of the only compositions to be performed more frequently was Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. By 1927, Paul Whiteman's band had played Gershwin's *Rhapsody* in the U.S. and Europe eighty-four times, and the recording sold over

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<sup>75</sup> "John Powell, 80, Pianist-Composer: Virtuoso Performer of the Classical Repertory Dies," *New York Times*, 16 August 1963, 27.

<sup>76</sup> "Negro Cause is Pushed by Harmonist," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 1926, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, 100–104.

<sup>78</sup> F. C. Shang, "F.C. Coppicus Presents Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra of Twenty-Five in Their First Transcontinental Concert Tour, Season 1924-1925" (New York: Townsend & McNerney, 1924), 5.

one million copies.<sup>79</sup> It was the *Rhapsodie*'s balance between modernist devices and late-Romantic harmonies, between the angular melodies and syncopated rhythms of purportedly authentic primitive source material and the melodious white Spirituals, between piquing audience fascination with black difference while confirming its inferiority that made it so popular. The balance between tonal conservatism and rhythmic inventiveness pleased and provoked 1920s audiences.

Though Powell tried to impress upon his audience a specific pseudo-scientific story about black Americans, he could not control how listeners heard his orchestral work. For one, the program was not always present at performances.<sup>80</sup> In the soundscape of symphonic jazz, the *Rhapsodie*'s caricatures of blackness could be heard more generally within the primitivist modernisms of American concert music. Indeed, reception demonstrates that audiences heard these virulent racist characterizations within the broader context of primitivist modernism. Most of the reception indicates this: "John Powell Dazzles in Rhapsodies: "Cubist" Variation of Negro Themes Filled with Rhythm," declares the title of one unsourced clipping from Powell's collection.<sup>81</sup> The article further reads: "[The Rhapsodie] scintillates with bizarre, grotesque and humorous effects in incredible profusion."<sup>82</sup> Olin Downes interpreted the finale as a "rousing carnival, reckless, bounding, uncouth." The music "leaps out at the listeners — alive."<sup>83</sup> Critics also interpreted the music through the lens of folkloric authenticity. This is

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<sup>79</sup> Frederick D. Schwarz, "Time Machine: 1924 Seventy-five Years Ago: Gershwin's Rhapsody," *American Heritage* 50:1 (February/March 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Programs, Box 34 Folders 2 — 10, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>81</sup> "John Powell Dazzles in Rhapsodies: "Cubist" Variation of Negro Themes Filled with Rhythm," News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>82</sup> Unsourced clipping, News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>83</sup> Olin Downes, "Music," n.d., *New York Times*, News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

“REAL NEGRO MUSIC,” proclaims an ad for the premiere.<sup>84</sup> For some, the *Rhapsodie* gave listeners a genuine taste of Africa with its “jungle scenes...voodoo rites and...wild barbaric rhythms.”<sup>85</sup> An unsourced review of the 1918 premiere claims, “Its themes are realities, not echoes, and derive their substance from the jungle itself, not the comparatively civilized plantation.”<sup>86</sup>

The *Rhapsodie* was heard within the general framework of 1920s concert music, which often relied on problematic representations of black culture. For some listeners, it might have confirmed the need to take serious action to prevent miscegenation. The *Rhapsodie* was also heard through the more banal racist lens of primitivism. That these could co-exist in a single composition shows the degree to which U.S. musical modernism depended on problematic black musical stereotypes for its artistic currency. What stood as nationalist and primitivist discourse was racialist fodder for a white supremacist. While Powell intended to express white power, listeners more often than not heard fascinating and provocative depictions of African Americans. Both reaffirmed white power and privilege.

## Conclusion

Both Edmund Jenkins and Powell used the elements of early jazz conservatively. However, they both performed their pre-1920s compositions in the Jazz Age, and audiences and critics heard their overall compositions belonging to an increasingly growing body of jazz-inspired classical works. The two took very different approaches to representing blackness.

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<sup>84</sup> Unsourced clipping, News Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>85</sup> “The Wild Barbaric Rhythms of John Powell’s Negro Rhapsody,” *Musical Courier*, 9 November 1929, reprint from *Literary Digest*, 16 February 1929, Clippings, Box 36 Folder 18, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>86</sup> Review of Modest Altschuler’s premiere in 1918, Clippings, Box 36 Folder 16, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

While they both portrayed a black past, Jenkins's music was a part of contemporary concert trends that quoted the Spirituals and Stephen Foster songs, while Powell concocted a phantasmic primitive figure to stoke white fears about integration.

That Powell's most experimental composition could communicate such intense racism and, at the same time, resonate with the trends of United States concert music speaks to how indebted modernism was to certain representations of blackness. However, this same modernism was available to black composers, who found unbelievably creative ways to push back against the racism baked in to the artistic expressions of the movement. They opened up new interpretive spaces, as I demonstrate in the next chapter on William Grant Still. Before proceeding to this chapter, however, I very briefly discuss the radical musical changes that I have been calling "the jazz explosion" in an interlude. These changes altered the compositional pathways composers took to solve "the Jazz Problem."

### Interlude: The Jazz Explosion

Thus far I have examined two composers who wrote compositions prior to 1920. Edmund Jenkins's *Charlestonia* (1919) and John Powell's *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) were both rooted in older representations of black culture, the Spirituals. Jenkins supplemented his use of the Spirituals with an African folksong and a Stephen Foster melody, while Powell added primitivist characterizations of black Americans via noisy and modernist compositional devices. Jenkins's and Powell's use of jazz is nuanced, brief, and confined to certain sections. These moments of jazz in compositions prior to 1920s were, at the time, unorthodox. Powell's and Jenkins's pieces extended previous U.S. concert traditions but, with a layer of innovation, laid the foundation for what became the Symphonic Jazz Vogue.

By the early 1920s, the profusion of jazz in America and Western Europe transformed how composers approached jazz-based composition. Record sales were at an all-time high, composers began to speak of its merit, Whiteman "made an honest woman out of jazz," and America could not get mentioned without a reference to black dance music. This was the jazz explosion. It was the Jazz Age. I examine this revolution below as it culminated between the years of 1922 and 1924.

### Jazz & the (Black) Music Industry

The popular music business underwent a radical transformation after World War I and it had everything to do with the unprecedented success of a new genre: jazz. The recording industry took off *because* of this new genre. Jazz represented a cornerstone of



American capitalism in a way that no other black music had previously.<sup>1</sup> It drove the music industry and permeated consumer culture and mass entertainment. The first jazz recording was in 1917 by Victor Talking Machine. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band's "Livery Stable Blues" was an instant success, but it would take a few years for jazz to saturate the market. Phonograph sales increased from 27.1 million in 1914 to \$158.7 million in 1919. The Victor Company, the biggest producer of talking machines and records, only made \$2.7 million in 1902 but \$51 million in 1921.<sup>2</sup> Elijah Wald says jazz led to a major turning point in the recording industry: "Jazz—in our modern sense of the term—had a special relationship to recording. The ODJB became national stars not because of great songs or a major tour but because they made exciting records, and the music they played was transmitted largely through that medium."<sup>3</sup>

Another important development crucial to the jazz explosion was radio. The first commercial radio station appeared in 1920 (Pittsburgh's KDKA), and within two years, there were over 200 stations broadcasting to sets in over 3 million homes. In 1924, *Etude* magazine exclaimed: "Tap American anywhere in the air and nine times out of ten Jazz will burst forth."<sup>4</sup> In 1925, Americans spent \$430 million on radios and audiences topped fifty million. By 1928, they spent double that amount and NBC created a coast-to-coast network so up to 80 percent of audiences could listen to a single show simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> These listeners preferred to listen to jazz; throughout the twenties it was what 60 to 70 percent of radio-

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<sup>1</sup> Burton Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>3</sup> Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Ogren, 154; and Wald, 92.

owners wanted to hear.<sup>6</sup> So thoroughly entwined were radio and jazz that the 1927 Radio Act included a clause which forbade “obscene, indecent or profane” language in an attempt to curb jazz consumption.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time jazz was rapidly diffusing, black performers were increasingly in control of representations of black culture, signaling a departure from minstrelsy-based entertainment of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Historian Kathy Ogren says it was clear that “black culture, like black people, could not be kept on the margins of American society.”<sup>9</sup> Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” broke the market’s racial barrier in 1920. As her 1921 tour came to a close, Smith had sold over half a million records.<sup>10</sup> Trying to capitalize off this unprecedented success, Victor, Columbia, Okeh, and Gennett recorded and sold race records across the nation. Black jazz artists began to penetrate the market more readily with popular hits such as King Oliver’s “Dippermouth Blues” in 1923 for Okeh. Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet cut their first recordings that same year, too. In addition, Eubie Blake’s and Noble Sissle’s *Shuffle Along* brought an all-black cast back to Broadway in 1921. This musical propelled the careers of Josephine Baker, Paul Robeson, and Florence Mills, who all became internationally renowned. Their routines brought black musical dance forms—the Black Bottom, the Shimmy, the Charleston—to audiences and made jazz nightclubs and venues across the globe famous.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wald, 92; and Ogren 154.

<sup>7</sup> Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 99.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890s—1915* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); and Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Ogren, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Hagstrom Miller, 192 and 200.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 233—263.

## The Whiteman Effect

Just as black performers were beginning to reap the benefits of the jazz explosion, white bandleaders were locating ways to make jazz more appealing to Jim Crow America's white middle-class audiences. Paul Whiteman was at the fore of the jazz explosion; his 1921 hit "Whispering" was a No.1 hit for 11 weeks and on the charts for 9 more weeks. That year, Americans purchased more than 100 million records—four times the amount five years prior in 1914. In 1923, he had become the best-selling artist on Victor by selling over 2 million copies of his debut hit.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1922 "saw the maturing of arranged jazz," according to jazz scholar Karl Koenig, but 1924 was a major turning point.<sup>13</sup> On February 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, Paul Whiteman brought jazz into the concert hall with An Experiment in Modern Music concert at Aeolian Hall. (To be sure, this was not the first time black dance music had been played in elite performance spaces. James Reese Europe's Clef Club Orchestra played a mixture of blues, ragtime, and dance music at Carnegie Hall in 1912.<sup>14</sup>) Whiteman opened the program with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's "Livery Stable Blues" and he closed it with George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. So successful was this concert that Whiteman toured the United States. His 1920s fame culminated in *King of Jazz*, a 1930 film featuring a revue performed by Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra.

Whiteman uplifted jazz. His Aeolian Hall concert created a narrative designed to show "what jazz was ten years ago" and "what a change has come over the face of Melusina and

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<sup>12</sup> Wald, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Koenig, ed., *Jazz in Print (1856—1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), xiv.

<sup>14</sup> Lester A. Walton, L. H. White, A. W. K. and Lucien H. White, "Black-Music Concerts in Carnegie Hall, 1912—1915," *The Black Perspective in Music* 6:1 (Spring 1978): 71—88.

Terpsichore in a decade,” according to one *Musical Courier* writer.<sup>15</sup> He made black popular music appealing to white middle-class audiences who discriminated against black culture.<sup>16</sup> This concert and Whiteman’s music relied on the interdependency of the high/low and black/white divides at play in modernist concert music.

“The Jazz Problem” became less controversial with so-called respectable white musicians as the face of its success. The August 1924 issue of *The Etude* tackling the problem told readers just that. “The magical treatment of Paul Whiteman,” legitimated jazz.<sup>17</sup> Discourses about jazz no longer referred to it solely as “negro” music; it was American. An article as early as 1920 hailed “Jazz and Ragtime are the Preludes to a Great American Music,” but this became the standardized way to talk about jazz after Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered.<sup>18</sup> With the successes of Whiteman, composers could bypass jazz’s association not only with lowbrow music but also with working-class blackness.

Author Elijah Wald argues that Whiteman alone accomplished this inconceivable task: “What had been considered the sound of low dives and wild youth was now a modern art music and the defining sound of its time.” Wald argues that Whiteman more than any other jazz figure in the 1920s facilitated the global acceptance of this music: “So in one decade Whiteman had not only become America’s best-known musician and sold more records than anyone alive, but he had also transformed dance music, transformed the world’s attitude

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<sup>15</sup> “‘An Experiment in Music,’” *The Musical Courier*, 21 February 1924, included in Koenig, 275.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 315; Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71 — 83; Don Rayno, *Paul Whiteman: Pioneer in American Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 79 — 121; John Howland, *Ellington Uptown: Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, & the Birth of Concert Jazz* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 1 — 5.

<sup>17</sup> George Ade, “The Etude,” vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 517.

<sup>18</sup> “Jazz and Ragtime are the Preludes to a Great American Music,” *Current Opinion*, August 1920, included in Koenig, 147.

toward jazz, and transformed popular singing.”<sup>19</sup> In a world structured by racial hierarchies this was quite a feat. Though, as I argue below, Whiteman had help.

### European Validation, Homegrown Americanisms

Maurice Ravel and Darius Milhaud were two of the first and loudest European proponents of jazz and their statements echoed across the Atlantic. In 1922, a story circulated the U.S. music press that Maurice Ravel, speaking to Edward Burlingame Hill, “considered jazz the only contribution America had so far made to music.”<sup>20</sup> That same year, an article in *Musical Quarterly* also reported that Darius Milhaud was “out for something new and vital, for folk-music in the making, not for museum pieces and ancient parlor tricks.”<sup>21</sup> It was jazz. By 1923, Milhaud would be referenced innumerable times for his opinion on jazz. Talking about the contemporary French school of composers, Milhaud wrote:

We are fascinated and intrigued by the jazz rhythms and are devoting serious study to it. There are new elements of clarity and rhythmic power which were a real shock to us when we heard jazz for the first time. It was in 1919, immediately after the war, that the first jazz band was heard in Paris. To us it was a musical event of genuine import. Music had long been under the domination of the Impressionist School. Poetry was the predominating element. Jazz came to us as a good shock—like a cold shower when you have been half asleep with ennui. It roused us electrically. All the young artists went every night to hear it played....Chopin was inspired by the Mazurka, Bach by the Sarabande—always we find great composers responding to the traditions of the times. Why should we not look upon our present day dances as the source of inspiration for our new music?<sup>22</sup>

Milhaud’s authentication of jazz materialized in *La Création du Monde* (1922–23)—a ballet based on African folk mythology, which premiered in 1923 at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in

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<sup>19</sup> Wald, 81 and 83.

<sup>20</sup> Carl Engel, “Jazz: A Musical Discussion,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1922), included in Koenig, 201.

<sup>21</sup> [Untitled], *Musical Quarterly*, 1922, included in Koenig, 222.

<sup>22</sup> “Jazz, Says Darius Milhaud, is the Most Significant Thing in Music Today,” *Musical Observer* (March 1923), included in Koenig, 235.

Paris.<sup>23</sup> European support gave U.S. composers the validation they needed to adopt this lowbrow black music as a modernist concert product. Ironically, it was the dance orchestras of James Reese Europe performing in Europe after World War I that would entice Europeans.

However, it is not quite accurate to say that European validation encouraged the use of jazz in classical music. The United States had been developing its own concert jazz tradition. Milhaud's *La creation du monde* is undoubtedly influenced by John Alden Carpenter's *Krazy Kat: A Jazz Pantomime* (1921). They were both short ballets which used jazz and featured the costumes and set designs of Fernand Léger. Carpenter went on to write *Skyscrapers: A Ballet of Modern American Life* in 1923 and 1924 for Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. It was his most experimental composition, with explicit and repeated jazz references. It represented "the dichotomy in American life between exuberant 'relaxation' and frantic work...through a tightly organized structure that also reflects a relationship with cubism."<sup>24</sup> In 1925, Whiteman commissioned a piece from Carpenter for his Second Experiment in Modern Music concert. *A Little Bit of Jazz* was featured in Whiteman's 1925—1926 transcontinental tour alongside other symphonic jazz pieces including Leo Sowerby's *Monotony* and Ferde Grofé's *Mississippi Suite*. Carpenter's work was purportedly the most well received.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, a visible U.S. modernist movement was taking shape with regular performances, institutional support, patrons, and attention from critics. As Carol Oja in

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<sup>23</sup> For more on this ballet, see: Deborah Mawer, *French Music and Jazz in Conversation: From Debussy to Brubeck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 99—135.

<sup>24</sup> Howard Pollack, *John Alden Carpenter: A Chicago Composer* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 217.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 267—268.

*Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* explains, from 1915 to 1920, the music of European composers (Stravinsky, Debussy, Scriabin, and occasionally Schoenberg) was performed more regularly than American composers (Leo Ornstein, Henry Cowell, and Percy Grainger, who were touring as piano virtuosos). However, from 1922 to 1924, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, and Ruth Crawford Seeger began to appear in the concert hall, and a self-identified group of ultra-modernists emerged. They were associated with Cowell, who had been documenting America's modern music since 1919 (actions that would eventually turn into his New Music Society in 1925 and its periodical *New Music* in 1927). Institutions formed including Edgard Varèse's International Composers Guild in 1921 and Claire Reis's League of Composers in 1923. The latter's quarterly *Modern Music* started the following year.<sup>26</sup> (It is also worth noting that the year 1922 has been given special attention in modernist studies. In Europe, 1922 gave birth to many high modernist products including Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Elliot's *The Waste Land*, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays*.<sup>27</sup>) Four years after World War I, a daring spirit had resurfaced, enlivening modernist art, literature, and music. Jazz was one way U.S. composers chose to signal the formation of a bold new modernism.

The language of representing blackness in the concert hall had changed. Now it was jazz. While there was a continuity of interest in "Negro melodies," the musical lexicon and moniker was different. Jazz represented modernity in a way that the Spirituals did not.<sup>28</sup> With

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<sup>26</sup> All of these facts come from Oja's stunning account of the formation of modernism in the 1920s in New York: Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–14.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 164–277.

both Americans and Europeans readily adopting jazz idioms into their concert music, jazz's relationship to art music changed. The topic of using jazz appeared in periodicals around 1921 but it dominated them by 1924.<sup>29</sup> The number of symphonic jazz works increased dramatically between 1924 and 1926.<sup>30</sup> Because of this, composers discovered greater freedom to exploit the intersection between the high/low and black/white divide in more provocative ways. They discovered a *modernist* response to "the Jazz Problem": to confront it head on and to use it as a point of rebellion against concert norms. In the last half of this dissertation, I discuss two composers who were at the forefront of this transformation.

#### William Grant Still, George Antheil, and "the (gendered) Jazz Problem"

William Grant Still's *Levee Land* (1925) and George Antheil's *A Jazz Symphony* (1925) represented a shift in approaches to jazz-based classical music. They used more radical and daring strategies to bring jazz into the concert hall, and they both hired famous black musicians to perform their works at their respective premieres. Still, in his four-song chamber work featuring a soprano, obliterated the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow musical forms and between music racially coded as white and black. Jazz and modernist concert traditions become very difficult, at times impossible, to parse out. Conversely, Antheil, in his single-movement rhapsodic orchestral work, establishes a diametrical opposition between black popular music and (white) classical music to bolster his belief that jazz was the solution to America's so-called weak concert traditions. For Antheil, primitive representations of blackness were the modern balm for America's musical ennui.

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<sup>29</sup> Mary Herron Dupree, "'Jazz,' the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s," *American Music* 4:3 (Autumn 1986): 288.

<sup>30</sup> Oja, 315.



Interestingly, both of these provocative statements about the role of jazz in classical music is articulated through gendered and sexualized symbols. Still plays with and sometimes challenges stereotypes of black female sexuality in vaudeville in the music he wrote for Florence Mills. Antheil banks on stereotypes of black male sexuality as a virile injection into his “bad boy of music” image and his industrial-sounding jazz.

That modernist composers used gendered language is not surprising. The high/low divide that concert jazz composers traversed was already gendered. As Andreas Huyssen argues, it was the very feminization of mass entertainment that made articulations of masculinity so central to modernism.<sup>31</sup> However, modernism had deeper roots in sexism beyond the high/low divide. Literary scholars Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that modernism was a response to the feminist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. “Sexual linguistics,” or the battle of the sexes, was the architecture of literary modernism.<sup>32</sup> Rita Felski complicates Gilbert’s and Gubar’s definition of modernism by drawing out the following dual conception. Representations of modernity were founded on “the imaginative centrality of *female* psychology and sexuality” as much as they were determined by the heroic and competitive masculinities of the autonomous male artist.<sup>33</sup>

American musical modernism had a complicated relationship to gender, especially after World War I. Musicologist Catherine Parsons Smith argues that “misogyny became an

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<sup>31</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii. Also, see: Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet, eds., *Modernism and Masculinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 3–64.

<sup>33</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1–10. Also see: Gail Finny, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Cornell University Press, 1989).

essential feature of American modernism as it developed after 1918.”<sup>34</sup> This is partly because women had come to dominate the world of music. Over the course of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, women increasingly became musicians, composers, music teachers, and patrons.<sup>35</sup> Music professions were beginning to be understood as women’s work. This was threatening to male musicians. Anti-woman attitudes surged after the war, “effectively suppressing the work of women as composers of art music, shutting them out of the modernist movement, or silencing them completely.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, hostility toward women was a commonplace modernist expression.

Anti-woman attitudes among male composers was complicated by the fact that American concert music had a reputation for being weak (read: feminine). According to musicologist Mary Dupree, composers in the 1920s felt there was a “deep-seated prejudice against American music.”<sup>37</sup> They lived in the shadow of the Austro-German canon and were often accused of merely regurgitating European traditions. It did not help that, as Nadine Hubbs has written, many famous American composers were trained by Nadia Boulanger, tonalists, and gay.<sup>38</sup> White male American composers felt as though their music was criticized because it was heard as feminine.

For composers such as George Antheil the solution to the gendered problem of American concert music was to inject it with virility, and in his compositions it would be that

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<sup>34</sup> Catherine Parsons Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility’: Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music,” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, edited by Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, 90–106 (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 90. Also see: Melissa J. De Graaf, “‘Never Call Us Lady Composer’: Gendered Reception in the New York Composers’ Forum, 1935–1940,” *American Music* 26:3 (Fall 2008): 277–308.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr, eds., *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Smith, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Herron DuPree, “The Failure of American Music: The Critical View from the 1920s,” *The Journal of Musicology* 2:3 (Summer 1983): 305.

<sup>38</sup> Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

of black men. In *A Jazz Symphony*, his representations of blackness were dependent on portraying jazz as an outgrowth of black male sexuality. Still's use of gender was less macho but no less controversial. He used what Rita Felski identified as "the imaginative centrality of *female* psychology and sexuality." With Florence Mills as the lead, *Levee Land* was in line with modernist composers who based their works on the psychic unfetteredness of a female protagonist. However, as I argue in the next chapter, Still used Mills in more respectable ways, and he showed the extent to which the currency of female sexuality in modernist art was structured by race.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Jazz Is Modernism:**  
**Black Experimentalism in William Grant Still's *Levee Land* (1925)**

After the jazz explosion, composers pitched the virtues of jazz as a solution to America's concert music identity crisis. Black composer William Grant Still illustrated that jazz and modernist concert music were actually analogous. No where is his desire to equate these two traditions more prominent than in the music he composed while studying with Edgard Varèse from 1923 to 1926. Still's 1925 work, *Levee Land*, especially challenged the divide between black popular music and early twentieth century American concert traditions.<sup>1</sup>

*Levee Land* suspends the modernist dialectics that drove the jazz-based compositions of John Powell and Edmund Jenkins. A suite for a soprano soloist and chamber orchestra, the piece features four short songs. Where jazz and classical music were, for the most part, segregated in *Afram*, they were fully integrated in Still's music. Where Powell created stark differences between racially coded music, Still made these differences impossible to hear. Where Jenkins and Powell referenced a constructed African past to frame their representations of blackness, no such reference occurred in *Levee Land*. Instead, Still used black music—primarily blues and jazz—in a decidedly avant-garde fashion that asserted black modernity. He also used contemporary vaudeville traditions, and *Levee Land* was sung by the single most revered black vaudeville performer of the time, Florence Mills.

Still obliterates the difference between jazz and modernist concert music—in part, because his composition ushered in a new era of audacious treatment of jazz in classical music but also because he was deeply seated in both the world of classical music and that of jazz in

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<sup>1</sup> Gayle Murchison, "Nationalism in William Grant Still and Aaron Copland Between the Wars: Style and Ideology," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, Accessed May 1, 2016. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

the 1920s. Still was integral to the jazz explosion. In the 1920s, he arranged and orchestrated for Will Vodery, Eubie Blake, Sophie Tucker, James P. Johnson, Donald Voorhees, and Paul Whiteman.<sup>2</sup> He played in and helped orchestrate and direct *Shuffle Along* (1921), *The Plantation Revue* (1922), *Runnin' Wild* (1923) *Dixie to Broadway* (1924), *Earl Carroll's Vanities of 1926*, and *Rain or Shine* (1928).<sup>3</sup> He played in the Clef Club Orchestra, Will Vodery's Plantation Orchestra, and the Harlem Symphony Orchestra. He worked for W.C. Handy's Pace & Handy Publishing Company in 1919-20 and the Black Swan Phonograph Company from 1922 to 1925. The *New York Times* declared him "orchestrator of much of the music for negro revues and other theatrical attractions."<sup>4</sup> Listeners of the Jazz Age likely encountered Still's arrangements.

Still was also an accomplished concert music composer. He attended The Oberlin Conservatory of Music in the late 1910s but left to play oboe in *Shuffle Along* in 1921. While in Boston for the musical, he studied composition with George Whitefield Chadwick. In 1922, he responded to a letter sent to the Black Swan Phonograph Company from Edgard Varèse, who was looking to teach a young black composer. Still responded and received the scholarship. The two worked together from 1922 and 1925, while Still wrote *From the Land of Dreams* (1924), *Darker America* (1924), *From the Journal of a Wanderer* (1924), *Levee Land* (1925), and *From the Black Belt* (1926). Thereafter, he wrote a symphonic triptych—*Africa* (1930), *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), and *Songs of a New Race* (1937). *Afro-American Symphony* became his most played and well-known composition. So accomplished in the world of classical music,

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Smith 4, 43, and 220; Carolyn L. Quin, "Biographical Sketch of William Grant Still," in *William Grant Still: A Bio-bibliography*, eds. Judith Anne Still, Michael J. Dabrishus, and Carolyn L. Quin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Smith, 70.

Still, by the middle of the twentieth century, would be cited in a long list of “firsts” by black Americans: the first American composer (of any race) to have an opera produced by a major opera company and later performed on national television, the first African American to conduct a major American symphony orchestra, and the first African American to have a symphony—and his first symphony, at that—performed by a leading orchestra. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra premiered it in 1931.

Still based many of his concert works on black folk and popular music, bringing together these seemingly oppositional musical worlds. In the early and mid-1920s, Still exploited the dual stereotypes of both black music and modernist compositions being noisy. However, his methodical approach to *Levee Land* reveals a genuine kinship between the two musics that prods at the notion they were ever antithetical. Gayle Murchison astutely compares *Levee Land* to Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, because they are both “intensely chromatic and contrapuntal” and “[test] the boundaries between the popular and the concert stage.”<sup>5</sup> Still communicates this kinship so exquisitely, because he lived in both of these musical worlds. He worked for a black-owned recording company, he studied with Varèse. He arranged black musicals, he composed pieces premiered at the International Composers’ Guild. This was not a switch between two different modes of musicality. This was one musical mode, one musical world, and this is palpable in *Levee Land*. His composition loudly asserts: Jazz *is* modernist.

To make this statement, Still hired a trained jazz performer to sing *Levee Land*, and like many modernist provocateurs, he used the language of gender to challenge the conventions of the concert hall. Florence Mills premiered the piece at the 1926 International Composers’

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<sup>5</sup> Murchison, “Nationalism in William Grant Still and Aaron Copland Between the Wars: Style and Ideology,” 183.

Guild concert in Aeolian Hall. With Mills at the helm, *Levee Land* sits at the nexus of a body of canonical modernist works that made women protagonists the center of their artistic expression: Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and Alban Berg's *Lulu*, among others. Unlike these individuals, Still challenged stereotypes that pervaded the entertainment industry, especially ones about black women and sexuality.

In this chapter, I analyze *Levee Land*'s first song, "Levee Song," to show how Still revealed the uncanny similarities between jazz and modernist concert music idioms. I then discuss Mills's reception and vaudeville persona, which challenged the division between black entertainment and respectability politics. It made her a perfect fit for articulating *Levee Land*'s political statement about the presence of black music in the concert hall, about the musical correlations between jazz and high modernism. I stop to analyze the last of the four songs, which uses vaudeville tropes to both challenge gender stereotypes and engage with "the Jazz Problem" as it was understood among black elites. I conclude by considering the reception of Still's music and Mills's performance to determine how and if Aeolian Hall audience members heard what Still was saying about the musical value of jazz.

### Jazz is Modernism

The first of the four selections in *Levee Land* is the most illustrative of the affinity between jazz idioms and modernist concert music traditions. *Levee Land* comprises four songs: "Levee Song," "Hey-Hey," "Croon," and "The Backslider." "Levee Song" is over three minutes long, and it is based on a blues form. The AAB stanzas depict a woman being mistreated by her lover (Table 3.1). The other three songs are markedly different. "Hey-Hey" is under a minute long and only three iterations of the same spoken text "HEY-HEY." In the

third song, “Croon,” the singer hums a mostly monophonic texture with the violin for nearly four minutes. “The Backslider” is the longest and most oriented toward jazz. It tells a story about the sinful proclivities of a young Christian woman, who blames jazz for her fall from grace. All of these songs blur the boundaries between the orchestra and the voices and make extensive use of vocables, humming, and speech. They resonate with other modernist works that experiment with language and the voice including Virgil Thomson’s *Four Saints and Three Acts*, Alban Berg’s songs, the novels of James Joyce, and the poetry of Langston Hughes.<sup>6</sup> However, *Levee Land* draws most heavily on black jazz and vaudeville to readily transition between speech and song.

Table 3.1 Lyrics and Form, “Levee Song,” *Levee Land* (1925), William Grant Still

Overall Form	Phrases	Lyrics
Introduction		(Hum)
A	a a b	Oh, Baby, Baby, Baby, Baby. Oh, Baby, I feels so Blue Sittin’ on de Levee A longin’, Babe, fo’ you.
B	a a b a	De sun, hit smile f’om high On de ribber flowin’ by; But dese weary Blues done kilt mah soul An’ I jis’ cry an’ cry.
	a a b a	Lawd, Lawd. Lawd, Lawd.
A	a a b	Oh, Baby, Baby, Baby, Baby. Oh, Baby, I loves you true. Can’t see what make you Treat me de way you do.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 138–181.



Musicologists Gayle Murchison and Carol Oja have written about *Levee Land* in their writings on Still, but they emphasize differences between its jazz/blues and classical music. Murchison, for example, cordons off “modernist elements” from “cultural modernism” in the titles of her sections, where “cultural” stands in for black and leaves modernism racially unmarked or white.<sup>7</sup> Oja says *Levee Land* “functions on two distinct planes.”<sup>8</sup> The first level is the vocalist’s melody and accompanying instruments, which she argues “present conventional blues-derived melodies and harmonies.” The second plane can be understood as “chromatic-third relationships that play off a basic trait of the blues but do so using the techniques of the young modernists.” Instead of seeing these as separate, my analysis highlights the inseparability of jazz and high modernism. Many of the elements in *Levee Land* can be understood as belonging to modernist concert music as well as jazz. These include the instrumentation, scales and pitch content, the relationship between the voice and chamber orchestra, the melodic and rhythmic cells, and its dramatic shifts in texture and timbre.

*Levee Land*’s instrumentation extends traditions of the Second Viennese School as well as 1920s jazz orchestras. The instrumentation includes 2 violins, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet alternating with alto saxophone, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, tenor banjo, piano, and percussion. As Murchison notes, with the exception of the bassoon, this was Duke Ellington’s Kentucky Club ensemble in 1926.<sup>9</sup> The program for the ICG Aeolian Hall premiere called it a “jazz orchestra,” but it was catalogued as a “suite for chamber orchestra.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gayle Murchison, “Nationalism in William Grant Still and Aaron Copland between the Wars: Style and Ideology,” 169.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Oja, “New Music and the ‘New Negro’: The Background of William Grant Still’s *Afro-American Symphony*,” *Black Music Research Journal* 12:2 (Fall 1992), 118.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Tucker, *Ellington: The Early Years* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 1997, quoted in Gayle, “Nationalism in William Grant Still and Aaron Copland between the Wars,” 177.

<sup>10</sup> B., R. C., “Novelties at Modernist Concert Range from Atonality to Sophisticated Jazz,” *Musical America* vol. 43, issue 15, January 30, 1926, 4 and 23, quoted in Quinn, 132.

In “Levee Song,” Still draws out the striking similarities between the octatonic scale, the blues scale, and the altered scale. A combination of two interlocking diminished seventh chords, the octatonic scale can be used to construct a dominant seventh chord and maps onto a blues and pentatonic scale quite easily.<sup>11</sup> It is also one note away from the altered dominant scale: a scale frequently used in jazz improvisation and based on a dominant seventh chord where all the non-essential tones—fifth, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth—are chromatically altered (Figure 3.1).<sup>12</sup> *Levee Land* slides between these various scales, blurring the boundaries of these scales and their cultural and racial contexts. The dissonant pitch content does not obscure the fact that this piece is designed to evoke jazz. It enhances it.

Figure 3.1. Altered Scale



Still elides distinctions between the octatonic, blues, and altered scales at the moment “Levee Song” begins. Three short phrases, bookended by a solo on one end and a fermata over a rest on the other, make up the introduction to the first blues stanza. The first phrase begins with a fiber-muted trumpet that plays through the G blues scale, emphasizing the first and fifth scale degrees. This allusion to tonality lasts only two measures before the strings and woodwinds offer a harmonic backdrop sutured together by the notes of OCT [0,1].<sup>13</sup> At the

<sup>11</sup> Aaron Copland, George Antheil, and Igor Stravinsky, among other composers, used the octatonic scale to evoke jazz. Still also possibly used the scale in *From the Journal of a Wanderer* (1924) according to Gayle Murchison in her dissertation, and Alexander Rehding features Still’s 1939 *Traceries* as an example of using octatonic collections.

<sup>12</sup> In the altered scale, the ninth has two altered forms, minor and augmented; the eleventh only one, augmented; the fifth two, diminished and augmented; and the thirteenth only one, minor.

<sup>13</sup> This notation comes from Stefan Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Post Tonal Music*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 25. OCT [0,1] = C, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A, Bb, C; OCT [1,2] begins on C#; and OCT [2,3] begins on D. The numerals in the brackets denote the first two pitch classes.

fifth measure, the bassoon bursts through with a tritone between the third and flattened seventh of the G scale. After a caesura, the soprano initiates the second phrase singing a descending minor third, which is both a part of the G major scale and OCT [0,1]. The third phrase, like the first, is brought in by a solo trumpet, but this time the trumpet is much more dissonant, shifting to another octatonic collection: OCT [1,2]. The orchestra without the voices joins in but with no references to a blues scale. There is one outlier: D#/Eb played by the alto saxophone and second violin. They are both juxtaposed against a G played by the bassoon and first violin to yield an augmented fifth. Here the octatonic and altered scale overlap.

Still also uses the pitch content of the vocal melodic line in the A sections to blur the distinction between the octatonic and blues scale. The voice stays within the octatonic collection being played by the orchestra (Figure 3.2). At the same time, its pitch content is drawn from a blues scale. It stays that way until the b phrase (of the aab blues lyric) enters. Here the orchestra abandons a strict octatonic collection to delineate the dominant to tonic chord progression. The voice mirrors this, singing through the dominant chord.

Figure 3.2. A section, “Levee Song,” mm. 26–29, *Levee Land* (1925), William Grant Still

**♩ = 76 Slow and mournful**

Clarinet in B $\flat$

Clarinet in A

Alto Sax

Bassoon

Horn

Trumpet in B $\flat$

Trombone

Perc.

Banjo

Voice

Violin I

Violin II

Piano

*p* *staccato*

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

Oh,  
sul ponticello

Baby,

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts from top to bottom:

- B♭ Cl.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Features triplet eighth-note patterns in both measures.
- A Cl.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Features triplet eighth-note patterns in both measures.
- A. Sx.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Features triplet eighth-note patterns in both measures.
- Bsn.**: Bass clef, key of D major. Features triplet eighth-note patterns in both measures.
- Hn.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- B♭ Tpt.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Tbn.**: Bass clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Perc.**: Bass clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Bjo.**: Treble clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Voice**: Treble clef, key of D major. Lyrics: "Baby, Ba - by, Ba - by,". Features a melodic line with a triplet in the first measure.
- Vln. I**: Treble clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Vln. II**: Treble clef, key of D major. Rests in both measures.
- Pno.**: Grand staff, key of D major. Features a blues harmonic progression with chordal strums and arpeggiations in both measures.

The ambiguity between jazz and modernist concert music is not persistent throughout “Levee Song.” The B section is tonal and oriented around a steady pulse. The tempo increases, and the banjo and piano play a blues harmonic progression with chordal strums and arpeggiations articulating each beat in common time. Where the voice had been occupying an intermediary space between diatonic and octatonic collections, it is now fully diatonic. It is

more melodically active and emphasizes the minor third, minor seventh, and flat five. It also hints towards more improvisatory gestures. Halfway through the bass drum and gourd act as a rhythm section and the soprano starts to sing “Lawd Lawd.” The vocal phrases cover a wide range and are more syncopated, sounding more extemporaneous. They also respond to the trumpet’s solo (or call), which plays through the blues scale.

One of the more inventive ways Still fuses high modernism and black popular music is by mapping the three octatonic collections onto chords: OCT [0,1] = I; OCT [0,2] = IV; and OCT [2,3] = V. The chamber orchestra travels through the three octatonic scales as if playing a standard blues progression perfectly grafted onto the aab verse (Table 3.2). The melodic motives in the accompaniment modulate by a rising perfect fourth and perfect fifth to buttress the movement to IV and V. In fact, it is this intervallic movement, played prominently by the winds, that encourages the listener to detect a sense of harmonic change just as the pitch collection changes.

Table 3.2. Octatonic Collections Representing a Blues Harmonic Progression, “Levee Song,” *Levee Land* (1925), William Grant Still

I	IV	I	[0,1]	[0,2]	[0,1]
Oh, Baby, Baby, Baby, Baby.			Oh, Baby, Baby, Baby, Baby.		
I	IV	I	[0,1]	[0,2]	[0,1]
Oh, Baby, I loves you true.			Oh, Baby, I loves you true.		
V			[2,3]		
Can’t see what make you			Can’t see what make you		
		I			[0,1]
Treat me de way you do.			Treat me de way you do.		

It is not just the interval changes that lend these motives their blues aesthetic; their melodic and rhythmic content signifies black popular music, too. There are two primary motives, which appear prominently at the beginning of each A section. The first motive is

played by the clarinets. Harmonized at the distance of a third, the clarinets move chromatically down a third and then return back up, creating a swaying figure (Figure 3.3). The motive is punctuated by lilting, eighth-note rhythms in the piano and bassoon. The left hand of the piano rolls a chord, suggested as the tonic by the soprano, while the bassoon outlines the first and fifth notes of the chord prefaced by a chromatic grace note. Its repetitive rhythmic motion and melodic contour sounds like riffs common in 1920s jazz arrangements—arrangements that Still heard, published through Pace and Handy, or composed himself. The first motive of “Levee Song” evokes the movement of water, ebbing and flowing against the levee. For popular jazz songs whose titles denoted a place or travel, it was common to use riffs which evoked the train or any extra-musical associations with the location.<sup>14</sup> Stepwise motion in parallel thirds also appeared regularly in jazz recordings. Fletcher Henderson’s “Copenhagen” and “Sugar Foot Stomp” are two examples recorded before Still wrote *Levee Land*.

Figure 3.3. Motive in the A Section, “Levee Song,” mm. 26–27, *Levee Land*

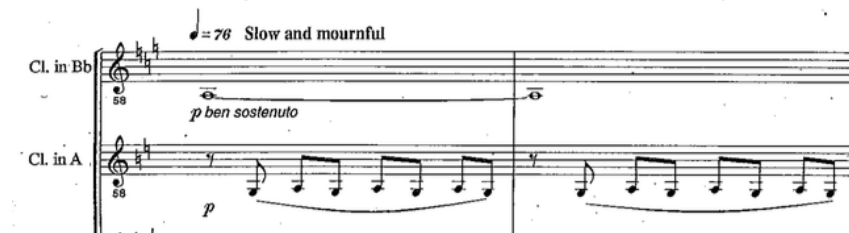


A different motive compliments the return of the A section at the end of “Levee Song.” Oscillating on a whole step, it begins right after the downbeat, punctuating its syncopation. It is played by one clarinet and doubled by the piano (Figure 3.4). Like the motive in the first A

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Magee, *The Uncrowned King of Swing: Fletcher Henderson and Big Band Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 59–62.

section, it also moves up a P4 and down a P5 to reinforce the blues harmonic progression, and its repetitive rhythmic motion and melodic contour make it sound like a jazz riff. It resembles those which appeared frequently in a foxtrot blues, or blues numbers for dance orchestras. Henderson's "Midnight Blues" and "Sud Bustin' Blues" recorded by Piron's New Orleans Orchestra are just two of the many examples.

Figure 3.4. Motive in the Return of the A Section, "Levee Song," mm. 58–59, *Levee Land*



The last connection Still makes between jazz and modernist concert music is subtler and requires thinking about the work as a whole, beyond just "Levee Song." *Levee Land* is full of intricate and purposeful musical gestures that were part of both the Second Viennese School of composition and early jazz band textures and timbres. Schoenberg's *Kleine Klavierstücke*, op. 19 (1911) and Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 10 (1913), for example, made abundant use of very nuanced sounds. These were "miniature," according to Richard Taruskin, and were important to the expressionist ethos: the articulation of the minutiae of complex and powerful psychic structures.<sup>15</sup> In these pieces, Schoenberg and Webern strove for maximum compression of expression—"every glance a poem, every sigh a novel," as Schoenberg put it.<sup>16</sup> Such nuance also occurred in early jazz with extreme shifts in texture,

<sup>15</sup> For more on expressionism, see: Daniel Albright, *Music and Modernism: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 259.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 347.



polyphonic improvisation, variety of articulation, and manipulation of timbre. All of these are alluded to in “Levee Song.” Strings move from muted to mutes off, horns from closed to open within a measure’s duration. Dynamics shrink to pianissississimo, and a small suspended cymbal is played at piano to round off a short phrase.

The connection between this avant-garde and jazz language is more palpable in the second song, “Hey-Hey,” which bears a striking resemblance to Alban Berg’s *Seven Early Songs* (1905–1908).<sup>17</sup> “Hey-Hey” is fourteen measures long. It is through-composed with three distinct phrases, marked A, B, and C in the score. Each phrase ushers in a new texture, pitch content, and set of repeated rhythmic and melodic cells. Subtle gestures and sometimes indecipherable changes in instrumentation, timbre, articulation, and dynamics occur frequently (Figure 3.5). Rapid changes in articulation and instrumentation pack the measures full of directives: the woodblock in one measure, the tom tom and bass drum (struck with a snare drum stick) in the next, then the gong immediately after with only a measure rest before the wind whistle enters. Berg’s *Seven Early Songs* are also set for a soprano and chamber orchestra. They are also very short, each one ranging from twenty to thirty measures. The tempo shifts from measure to measure, and the score is dense with dynamic changes. Like *Levee Land*, these songs comprise compact musical gestures.

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<sup>17</sup> I would like to thank Michael Puri for helping me analyze *Levee Song* and for drawing out its connections to the expressionist idioms of the Second Viennese School.

Figure 3.5. “HEY-HEY,” mm. 1–5, *Levee Land*

**Moderately fast** ♩ = 128

A

Clarinet in B $\flat$

Clarinet in A

Bass Clarinet

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in B $\flat$

Trombone

Perc.

Tenor Banjo

Voice

Violin I

Violin II

Piano

*closed*

*metal mute*

*metal mute*

*open*

*Turn halfway, leaving side of face visible to audience and view orchestra contemplatively*

**Moderately fast** ♩ = 128

A

Act 2, Scene 1

B♭ Cl. *f* *subito p*

A Cl. *f* *subito p*

B♭ Cl. *f* *subito p*

Bsn. *f* *p*

Hn. *f* *ben marcato* *solo*

B♭ Tpt. *mf* *stacc.*

Tbn. *mf*

Perc. *f* *wood block* *mf* *tom tom & bass drum struck with s. dr. stick* *p* *gong*

T. Bjo. *f*

Voice *f* (Face Audience) Spoken as if surprised HEY-HEY

Vln. I

Vln. II

Pno. *sempre f*

Unlike Berg, Still infuses this avant-garde language with vaudeville hokum. Each phrase is punctuated by the soprano speaking the word “Hey-Hey.” Detailed stage instructions direct the soprano to change her comportment for each iteration. To start “turn half way, leaving side of face visible to audience, and view orchestra contemplatively.” Then

“face audience” and speak the first “Hey-Hey” “as if surprised,” “gaping at the orchestra” afterward. Then speak it “as if questioning” and “smile approvingly and move body slightly in response to rhythm.” Before the song ends and the final “Hey-Hey” is spoken, “hesitate and then stop movement of body abruptly,” to say it once more “as if disgusted.” In addition, the use of the wind whistle signified what Paul Whiteman called “good old-fashioned hokum” and what musicologist Jeffrey Magee calls “a strong streak of parody” heard in novelty songs.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the *Musical Courier* described *Levee Land* as “four foolish jazz jokes,” and Still noted on the score that “Hey-Hey” was intended to be “humorous.”<sup>19</sup> This is particularly evident in the “moderately fast” tempo. The orchestra’s compact melodic motives come and go at a moment’s notice. So rapid they serve more as rhythmic fodder, if not also comedic fodder.

In the *modus operandi* of expressionism—a precise and rigorous piecing together of intricate musical gestures demanding technical precision—Still found resonance in the arrangement and performance techniques of jazz. *Levee Land* betrays an undeniable resonance between jazz and high modernism. If jazz had a reputation for being rambunctious and incapable of subtlety, Still shows his audience that jazz takes skill, concentration, and most importantly, composition. It belongs in the concert hall.

This bold statement about the relationship between jazz and modernism is communicated through a female lead and the sexual topoi of vaudeville skits and songs. “Hey-Hey” was a slang term which denoted any of the following: “good-time girl,” “problems, controversy, action,” “sexual intercourse,” or “a promiscuous woman.”<sup>20</sup> In a song explicitly

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<sup>18</sup> Magee, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Anne Still, Michael J. Dabrishus, and Carolyn L. Quin, *William Grant Still: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 133; William Grant Still, “Personal Notes,” in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, 224.s

<sup>20</sup> Jonathon Green, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang*, 2d ed. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 711.

about sex, the singer breaks the fourth wall and confronts the viewer's gaze. In each iteration of "Hey-Hey," she travels through three different emotions, or what could have been perceived as responses to sexual advances. First, she is shocked and jaw-dropped. Then she considers it with a smile and modest dance. But ultimately she becomes disgusted and rejects whatever is before her. Though "Hey-Hey" is a clear nod to black entertainment theater, it does not presume the sexualization of the female jazz performer. It rejects it. Just as Still makes a bold statement about the relationship between black popular music and modernist concert traditions, he bucks 1920s stereotypes of black women performers. Still does this again in the fourth and final song, "The Backslider."

#### "The inimitable ways of Florence Mills"

By 1926, Mills was at the height of her career, and she had become a central figure in the New Negro Renaissance. She had made her Broadway debut in *Shuffle Along* (1921), which shattered records for all-black musicals. She performed at Will Marion Cook's Plantation Club in the *Plantation Revue* the next year, and in 1923, she established an international reputation with London's *Dover Street to Dixie*. She was regarded as a cosmopolitan New Negro who embodied the Harlem Renaissance's influence on the rest of the world. Her career symbolized black urbanity and race progress. Jayna Brown, in her study on black women variety show performers, states that Mills was "the New Black Woman—urban, emancipated, cultivated, traveling abroad to represent the black cultural capital and the mobility of its people."<sup>21</sup> In the *Negro Digest* obituary of Mills, who died at a

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 245.

young age from tuberculosis in 1927, Ward Greene wrote “she was Harlem itself.”<sup>22</sup> In 1925, Mills returned to Vodery’s club and Still worked with her there as he orchestrated the show and performed in the band. It was there he asked if he could write something for her to perform in the concert hall. He wrote *Levee Land*.

Despite being a vaudeville entertainer, Mills was a symbol of black respectability and racial uplift for two reasons: 1) she was vocal about racial inequality and 2) her performance persona and oeuvre were not sexual. Regarding, the first, Mills used her fame in mass entertainment as a political platform. She spoke about racial equality in interviews throughout the 1920s. Her 1923 theme song, “I’m a Little Blackbird Looking for a Bluebird,” was understood as a “powerful protest against racial intolerance.”<sup>23</sup> It is about a black woman who cannot find love because she’s a “jazzbo,” but it was interpreted as a parody of white perceptions of black entertainers. By 1926, Mills developed a more confrontational tone in line with other New Negroes. In particular, she wrote an article called “The Soul of the Negro,” which was published in London’s *Sunday Chronicle*.<sup>24</sup> In it, she writes:

It is the eternal burden of the coloured people—the penalisation for an accident of birth—to be made to feel out of focus with the rest of humanity...How absurd it all is—how utterly unfair! There is not a coloured man or a coloured woman in existence who does not bitterly resent the sentiment that drives them beyond the pale.<sup>25</sup>

Her outspokenness made her “an elected favorite among black stage people; she was an artist’s artist.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Brown, 248.

<sup>23</sup> Bill Egan, *Florence Mills: Harlem Jazz Queen*, Studies in Jazz, No. 48 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 113.

<sup>24</sup> Zakiya R. Adair, “Respectable Vamp: A Black Feminist Analysis of Florence Mills’ Career in Early Vaudeville Theater,” *Journal of African American Studies* 17 (2013): 10.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Egan, 178.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, 240.

Black elites might have been tempted to write her work off as cheap entertainment for racist white audiences, especially as she moved from black-produced American entertainment (*Shuffle Along*) to white-produced entertainment overseas (*From Dover Street to Dixie*), but this was not the case. Edmund Jenkins, for example, featured her as a guest artist in his 1921 Coterie of Friends concert, and he wrote “The Charleston Revue” in *Afram* (1923) to be performed by a performer like Mills. Alain Locke, who was especially critical of mass entertainment and commercial culture, hailed the dramatic gifts of Mills (along with Bert William and Bill Bojangles Robinson) for “gleaming through” the “slag and dross” of the vaudeville stage.<sup>27</sup> Brown describe this tension in Mills’s career quite poignantly, writing: “Despite of, and perhaps because of, her fame in white-produced stage revues in London, black Harlem loved Mills. Her outspoken race loyalty seemed to quite black anxieties about the deleterious effects of cosmopolitanism and commercialism.”<sup>28</sup>

Mills’s performance style was unique. She had a reedy and thin soprano voice, and she was short (5’ 3”) and petite. She was, in essence, “bird-like.”<sup>29</sup> She was also light-skinned. Mills’s voice and physicality “suggested a joyful but sophisticated exuberance.”<sup>30</sup> Critics often compared her to a child or even a boy.<sup>31</sup> The songs in her oeuvre had broad appeal: “I’m Simply So Full of Jazz” from *Shuffle Along*, “Down Among the Sleepy Hills of Ten-Ten-Tennessee” from *Dover Street to Dixie*, and “I’m a Little Blackbird Looking for a Bluebird” from *Dixie to Broadway*.

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<sup>27</sup> Alain Locke, “The Negro and the American Stage,” *Theatre Arts Monthly* 10:2 (February 1926); quoted in Adair, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, 240.

<sup>29</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattant* (New York: Knopf, 1930), 199.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Fry, 62; and Brown, 245.

Critics and audiences often wrote about Mills as if she was a primitivist work of art, challenging her association with lowbrow entertainment. According to Brown, Mills “combined grotesquery and grace” in a way that resonated with primitivist modernism. The *Evening Mail* encapsulates this interpretation when a critic writes:

This sensational little personality, slim, jaunty, strung on fine and tremulous wires, continues to tease the public’s sense of the beautiful and odd... There is an impudent fragility about her, a grace of grotesqueness, a humor of wrists, ankles, pitching hips and perky shoulders that are not to be resisted. She is an exotic done in brass.<sup>32</sup>

Brown notes that these features came up in descriptions of her singing voice, too. She quotes Heywood Broun, who wrote in *The World*: “She does not precisely sing, but she makes strange high noises which seem to fit in somehow with a rapid fire sort of sculpture.”<sup>33</sup>

Her performance features and the way critics and audiences interpreted them helped decouple her sexuality from her art in way that was not always possible for other vaudeville performers such as Adelaide Hall and Josephine Baker.<sup>34</sup> Mills was a “rococo Creole” compared to Josephine Baker’s “‘simian’ animality.”<sup>35</sup> James Weldon Johnson, in *Black Manhattan*, sums Mills up quite nicely, writing: “She could be whimsical, she could be almost grotesque; but she had the good taste that never allowed her to be coarse. She could be *risquée*, she could be seductive; but it was impossible for her to be vulgar, for she possessed a naïveté that was alchemic.”<sup>36</sup>

Because she was outspoken about racial inequality and because she was less sexualized than other black entertainers, Mills operated in an interstitial space between high and low culture. It is precisely why she was so crucial to communicating Still’s ideas about the role of

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Brown, 246.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Brown, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Fry, 62; and Brown, 245.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, 245.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, 787–788.



black popular music in a high modernist composition. It was also Florence Mills that drew such a large audience, “many of whom...came merely to witness Florence Mills in the role of a concert artist.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, there was standing room only for this ICG concert. Still capitalized off Mills’s reputation to fashion a bold confrontation of “the Jazz Problem.” This is most explicit in the last song, “The Backslider,” which takes up the seeming opposition between Christian respectability and listening to jazz. To challenge this opposition, Still used comedic and gendered vaudeville tropes.

#### “The Last Song Was Repeated”

Mills’s execution of “The Backslider” was a hit, and the audience asked Mills to sing it again. She did. This is because the last of the four songs relied more heavily on vaudeville tropes and jazz idioms. It had a narrative, it was funny, and it was suggestive. The song is about a woman who falls from grace because of jazz. Mills narrates her own dissent and does so unabashedly and comically. She leads the listener through a sermon, her friend’s invitation to a nightclub (a temptation by the devil, according to protagonist), and jazz’s abiding effect as she lets it penetrate her ears in the nightclub. The music of the last half is the backdrop of the nightclub; it sounds like a jazz band playing. While all of *Levee Land* can be seen as a response to “the Jazz Problem,” “The Backslider” confronts the notion that jazz might degrade the moral fabric of society. Still shows that jazz is as powerful and vital to black culture as Christianity. He does this through the comedic and gendered tropes of popular entertainment.

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<sup>37</sup> William Grant Still, “Personal Notes,” in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, 223.

The most obvious use of vaudeville in “The Backslider” is the presence of a narrative (Table 3.3). Mills tells us a story about herself, but she does it in a playful way. The lyrics use a thick dialect playing theater tropes to the hilt. To begin the song, Mills asks the audience, “Fo’kses, is you got erligion? / An ‘ef you is, do you wanna keep it?” It is a quirky melody and bounces all over the place in a way that suited her persona and singing voice (Figure 3.6). The protagonist claims she had “erligion onct” but “done los’ it.” “How?” she asks. The singer “casts a furtive glance at the orchestra” and then “sotto voce” utters the word “JAZZ!” Designed to intrigue and entice, this prefatory section sets a playful tone. After this frame, she tells us about “Parson Simmons,” who “leads de Baptis’ flock” warns the congregation against sinful behavior. She impersonates him but assures the listener “don’ mean fo’ to mock.” But, of course, her impersonation of a male preacher is comical. The texture thins out, and the orchestra adopts a recitative style as Mills quotes the Pastor, singing “O bred’ren an’ sistahs, Motha’s gone to de Promus lan’.”

Table 3.3. Lyrics, “The Backslider,” *Levee Land* (1925), William Grant Still

	Instrumental Introduction
<p>Fo'kses, is you get erligion?          An 'ef you is, do you wanna keep it?          You ax me why?          Well Ah had erligion onct          But Ah done los' it.          You ax me how?          “JAZZ”</p>	Frame Narrative Intro
<p>Parson Simmons,          He leads de Baptis' flock,          Ulster say dese wo'ds each Sunday:          (Ah don' mean fo' to mock.)          “O bred'ren an' sistahs,          Motha's gone to de Promus lan'.”          (Spoken) Co'se Ah was allus mongst de fus' to ansah up “Aman.”          “Does you wanna jine huh on de final jedgement day?          Den you's got to trabbel de long an' narrer way.”</p>	Church Service
<p>So Ah done man lebel best to lib right ebry day.          But de debbil he wan' satisfied          An' song Mag Green to say          Dat dar would be a big blowout          Whar a gran' jazz ban'd play.</p>	Devil's Temptation
<p>Nachly Ah wanted to hyeah 'em          An she say dat it wan' wrong          So w'en de night fo' de doin's come          Ah des went right 'long.</p>	Resistance to Temptation
<p>Sho' Ah was a little scairt          Bout what de fo'ks mout say          But, Laws, Ah des fo'got it all w'en de ban' sta't up to play.</p>	Fall from Grace
<p>Fo'kses, W'en dem <u>fiddles</u> so an' cry          An' den go kinder fas' an' spry          Ah felt erligion go'in'.</p> <p>[x5 “banjo,” “co'net,” “slide trombone,” “saxtyphone,” “all”]</p>	Nightclub Jazz Band Strains
<p>O, Ah know it's wrong to stray,          But ef you'd hyeah dat jazz ban' play          You'd feel erligion goin'. Goin'. Goin'.</p>	Final Strain

Figure 3.6. Introduction, “The Backslider,” mm. 4–7, *Levee Land*

The musical score for the introduction of "The Backslider" from *Levee Land* (measures 4–7) is presented in two systems. The first system features a Voice part with a *f* dynamic and *quasi recitativo* style, singing the lyrics "Fo'k ses, is you got er - lig - ion? An' of you". The Violin I and Violin II parts enter with a *pizz.* (pizzicato) attack, followed by an *arco* (arco) section with a *colla voce* (colla voce) marking. The Piano part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "is, do you wan - na keep it?". The Violin I and Violin II parts continue their accompaniment, with the Violin I part marked *poco rall.* (poco rallentando). The Piano part features a *solo* section with a *mf* dynamic.

Still uses musical platitudes to evoke the extra-musical ideas of the story, drawing on vaudeville’s tendency toward hokum. For example, Mills’s fall from grace is represented by descending modulations from G to D, detectable by the ear. When the protagonist impersonates the preacher, the key changes to F. The devil then tempts her through her friend Mag Green, who asks her to come hear a “gran’ jazz band play,” and the tonal center moves

down one more half step to E. The key then changes to E-flat when she sings about wanting to go with Mag to hear the band and once more to D when the jazz band plays and “des fo’got it all.” Another platitude occurs when Mills sings “But de debbil he wan’ satisfied / An’ song Mag Green to say.” The minute she utters the word “devil” a saxophone enters and plays through a diminished chord.

Finally, the last half of “The Backslider” is the sound of black entertainment, and it is the most explicit quotation of jazz in *Levee Land*. It is a simulation of the protagonist’s experience in the nightclub. Mills sings through a series of strains in which she identifies instruments in the danceband. She starts with the fiddles, singing: “Fo’kses, W’en dem fiddles sob an’ cry / An’ den go kinder fas’ an’ spry / Ah felt erligion go’in.” Subsequent verses point out the banjo, cornet, slide trombone, and “saxtyphone,” and each instrument solos at the moment Mills sings about it. Unlike other portions of *Levee Land*, the rhythm is steady and a tonal center is clear and present. The harmony toggles between an F-sharp Alt5 chord and a G Alt5 chord over an F major chord in the first two lines (a, a). In the final and contrasting line (b) of the strain, the banjo plays a dominant to tonic chord progression.

However, it was the execution of this music—the stuff that exceeds the confines of the score—that nodded so assuredly to vaudeville. Critics provided a sense of what this looked and sounded like, of how Mills performed *Levee Land*. In reviews, her performance was written about more than Still’s music. She was the star of the show and she was funny that night. “[Miss Mills] sang the songs with just the right freedom of expression and with mischievous nuances,” wrote Osgood.<sup>38</sup> Downes called her a “comedienne” and wrote: “For the audience, it appeared that curiosity centered on the performance of Miss Mills...The interest of the

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<sup>38</sup> Henry O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1926), 46.

performance, the real interest and value such as it was came from the performer...She more than did [the composer] justice.”<sup>39</sup> “Her contagious humor,” was noted by one critic.<sup>40</sup> The *New York World Review* wrote that, for all four songs,

Miss Mills gave them a perfect interpretation. She sang them sensuously and lovingly, but she did more, she rolled her eyes here and she shrugged her shoulders there and the audience squirmed excitedly and laughed like a good neighbor. It was a pretty jolly evening for a concert hall.<sup>41</sup>

Mills’s execution of “The Backslider,” as well as the other three songs of *Levee Land* brought the jazz that happens outside the concert hall into Aeolian Hall. In *Levee Land*, Still does not advocate for approximations of jazz by white composers to be placed in high art contexts, but rather jazz itself—the jazz recorded on the phonograph, written in stock arrangements, and sung by vaudeville performers.

“The Backslider” is not only a response to “the Jazz Problem” among composers and classical music audiences but also among black intellectuals and elites. This song is a direct engagement with the challenge jazz posed to respectability politics. Some black leaders saw jazz as a threat to both Christian virtue and racial progress, while others praised jazz for its modern ethos and its rebellious *modus operandi*.<sup>42</sup> Still playfully pits the congregation against the jazz nightclub, making it irresistible not to see their resonances as the protagonist toggles between the two. Through humor, Still gets the listener to sympathize with the protagonist as she falls from grace, ensuring the jazz band music will be well received. Finally, with the venerable Florence Mills as the lead singer, jazz is less threatening and the idea that it threatens Christian respectability, less viable.

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<sup>39</sup> Olin Downes, “Music,” *New York Times*, 25 January 1926, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> B., R. C., “Novelties at Modernist Concert Range from Atonality to Sophisticated Jazz,” *Musical America* vol. 43, issue 15, January 30, 1926, pg. 23, quoted in Quinn, 132.

<sup>41</sup> Still, “Personal Notes,” in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, 223.

<sup>42</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on this New Negro conversation, see Chapter One: “From ‘Folk Jazz’ to Cosmopolitan Jazz: Edmund T. Jenkins and the Formation of the International New Negro,” 49–53.

As he did in “Hey-Hey,” Still makes this bold statement in and through gendered and sexualized language. This moment draws on erotic tropes of theater and sexualized stereotypes of black female performers. Picking up on “jazzmania” discourses, jazz becomes Mills’s drug, the thing she desires. It leads her astray. Still subjects the audience to an extended downward spiral of a black woman on stage. They witness her pleasure. It is not hard to imagine this had erotic connotations to it, given jazz’s associations with bawdy entertainment and sexual promiscuity. The ultimate fall from grace story — Adam and Even — is highly sexualized. Here, a black female body might have become a vehicle through which concert hall audiences could experience bawdy music.

However, the musical form and lyrics of “The Backslider” tell a different story. Mills occupies a position of power on several fronts. First, she is in control of her actions. The temptation by the devil is very tongue-in-cheek, and she consciously chooses to hear the jazz band play. She enacts and relishes in her own pleasure — over and over again as Still play up the stereotype of black popular music being repetitive.<sup>43</sup> Second, Mills subjects the audience to the very music that purportedly turns the saint into sinner through a comical blow-by-blow announcement of each instrument. Third, so confident is she of the transformative power of jazz, she predicts the audience will have the same experience as her in the song’s last three lines: “O, Ah know it’s wrong to stray, but ef you’d hyeah dat jazz ban’ play you’d feel erligion goin’. Goin’. Goin’.”

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<sup>43</sup> This stereotype was used to denigrate the cultural worth of black popular music, specifically, and popular music more broadly. This perspective is articulated poignantly in Theodor Adorno’s 1942 critique of Tin Pan Alley: Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* IX (1941): 17–48. For an essay on both this problematic stereotype and the cultural value of repetition, see: James A. Snead, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, edited by Robert G. O’Meally, 62–81 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

This is not a standard morality tale; it is a plot to legitimate jazz orchestrated by two central figures in the industry: William Grant Still and Florence Mills. They turn “jazzmania” discourse on its head as they convince the audience of the pleasure of listening to jazz. At the International Composers’ Guild premiere, they were convinced. In a move that merged both the vaudeville tradition of “stopping the show” and the concert hall tradition of applauding for an encore, the audience asked Mills to perform “The Backslider” once more, according to Olin Downes.<sup>44</sup> “The last song was repeated.”<sup>45</sup>

#### “Not real jazz, not real modernism”: *Levee Land*’s Reception

Still wrote a composition that articulated the glaring and undeniable affinities between jazz and modernism. Did his Aeolian Hall audience hear it? Many might have heard the music within the framework of primitivism that shaped white reception of black art in the 1920s. The opening of “Levee Song” is incredibly picturesque and could be heard as drawing on the exoticist strategies of both nineteenth-century opera and early-twentieth-century black entertainment. The introduction has the score markings “very slow and very soft (as if heard from afar)” for muted violins. Indeed, the sonic environment is elusive and subtly hints at something distant. It is meterless and long rhythmic durations are balanced with multiple measure-long rests. Brief solos give blurry hints of what is to come, and all chamber accompaniment quietly enters at unexpected moments decreasing to pianissississimo dynamics. The voice initiates a monophonic texture comprised of a repeating descending third figure, acting as a mournful caricature of a blues song. It draws the listener in at the same time

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<sup>44</sup> I would like to thank Alli Robbins for helping me work through some of the vaudeville aspects of “The Backslider” in an extensive email conversation.

<sup>45</sup> Olin Downes, “Music,” *New York Times*, 25 January 1926, p. 25.



it sets the stage much like the first scene of a cabaret show. Connie's Inn and the Cotton Club regularly featured primitivist depictions of black culture with settings designed to represent Africa or the rural South.<sup>46</sup>

Some response from the critics indicates a more complicated understanding of *Levee Land*'s affront to the division of jazz and classical music. Henry Osgood mentioned it in his 1926 landmark text on highbrow jazz, *So This Is Jazz*. He writes, "The music, cleverly utilization what might be called the earmarks of jazz, was most ingenious—sane and healthy, yet of decided originality."<sup>47</sup> In *Musical America*, a critic calls *Levee Land* "sophisticated jazz," but he concludes the union of jazz and "sophisticated harmony" is not a happy one.<sup>48</sup> Olin Downes of the *New York Times* treats *Levee Land* less favorably, but his language suggests he discerned some of Still's more complicated statement about jazz's relationship to modernist concert music. Downes had criticized Still for his 1925 ICG premiere of *From the Land of Dreams*—a highly experimental, three-movement work for three voices, "used instrumentally," and chamber orchestra:

One hoped for better things from Grant Still...for he knows the rollicking and often original and entertaining music performed at negro revues...But Mr. Varese [*sic*]...has driven all that out of him. Is Mr. Still unaware that the cheapest melody in the revues he has orchestrated has more reality and inspiration in it than the curious noises he has manufactured?<sup>49</sup>

About *Levee Land*, Downes calls them "jazz ditties, strangely modernized." He says "Levee Song" is the best of the four, but it is "neither real jazz nor real modernism."<sup>50</sup> Downes's use of

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<sup>46</sup> For more on these entertainment tropes, see: Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890s—1915* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); and Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Osgood, 46.

<sup>48</sup> B., R. C., "Novelties at Modernist Concert Range from Atonality to Sophisticated Jazz," *Musical America* vol. 43, issue 15, January 30, 1926, pg. 23, quoted in Quinn, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Olin Downes, "Music," *New York Times*, 9 February 1925, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

the word “real” here is meant to skewer the composer for what Downes ultimately determines is “artificial” music, but Downes’s commentary is insightful. It intimates a vague awareness of what Still was trying to do with this jazz-based composition: to suspend these musical categories altogether so that *Levee Land* was not *quite* jazz and not *quite* modernism.

From these reviews, it appears as though critics detected what Still was trying to communicate about jazz, but they just rejected it. *Levee Land* exceeded white expectations of art music by a black composer. Hostility toward his resolute uses of jazz were not new and did not subside. In general, his experimental compositions from this time period received mixed reviews.<sup>51</sup> As Still turned to more tonal and traditional approach to using black vernacular and popular music in his compositions, he received better reviews and had more prestigious performances. Yet, *Levee Land* revealed an early love for vocal genres, and it was an important precursor to his operas: *Blue Steel* (1934), *Troubled Island* (1938), *A Bayou Legend* (1941), *A Southern Interlude* (1942), and *Costaño* (1949–1950).<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Still’s response to “The Jazz Problem” embodied the confrontational tone of both avant-garde music and a New Negro disposition. This was not just while he was studying with Varèse. He began writing in this style before. His 1922 *Black Bottom* was “cast in a decidedly ultra-modern idiom.”<sup>53</sup> From this body of work *Levee Land* most decisively challenges the dichotomy between high and low, between black popular music and modernist concert music.

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<sup>51</sup> Still, “Personal Notes,” 222–235.

<sup>52</sup> For more on Still’s operas, see: Tammy L. Kernodle, “Arias, Communists, and Conspiracies: The History of Still’s *Troubled Island*,” *Musical Quarterly* 83:4 (1999): 487–508; and Gayle Murchison, “New Paradigms in William Grant Still’s *Blue Steel*,” in *Blackness in Opera*, eds. Naomi André, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor, 141–163 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Verna Avery, “William Grant Still,” in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, 312.

He rejects the notion that musics, socially constructed as white or black, were mutually exclusive. In it, jazz is modernism and modernism is jazz.

By the end 1920s, however, Still grew more conservative in how he utilized representations of black music in his compositions. The two pieces of his symphonic trilogy—*Africa* (1930) and *Afro-American Symphony* (1930)—are decidedly tonal. With its final installment, *Songs of a New Race* (1937), Still creates a narrative about black history and social advancement. Whereas *Levee Land* was a cutting-edge statement about the current state of black modern music, his compositions in 1930 turned to representing African blackness in *Africa* and a depiction of “the Old Negro” in *Afro-American Symphony*.<sup>54</sup> He was searching for and found “an idiom that would be modern but not so much so that it would fail to be recognized at once as Negroid.”<sup>55</sup> From these compositions he received the most praise from critics and commissions for performances. Not surprisingly, he abandoned the ultra-modern style of his earlier compositional career, but he never abandoned the use of black vernacular in his music and he always saw it as a means to advance the race.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Still, “Personal Notes,” 223.

<sup>56</sup> For more on this change in his approach to composition, see: Still, “The Art of Musical Creation” and “Negro Music in the Americas,” in *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays in American Music*, A Special Issue of *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*, ed. Jon Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 81–85 and 91–94.

**Chapter Four:**  
**George Antheil's "Hyper-Jazz":**  
**Seeing and Hearing Race at the 1927 Carnegie Hall Premiere of *A Jazz Symphony* (1925)**

George Antheil was at the forefront of the jazz explosion. He first used jazz at the age of 17 in his piano composition *Valse Profane* (1917). Five years later, he toured Europe with jazz-based piano pieces—*Jazz Sonata* (1922) and *Sonata Sauvage* (1922–1923). In a German little magazine, he published a manifesto about developing a distinct American concert music sound through jazz. Having established his penchant for black popular music, the composer received a commission from Paul Whiteman in 1925. After *Rhapsody in Blue*'s success, Whiteman wanted to be associated with all the prominent symphonic jazz composers, but he promptly rejected what he received from Antheil.<sup>1</sup> *A Jazz Symphony* was not at all like Gershwin's "jazz classique"; there was no lady to be made out of this music.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on cubism, futurism, and dada, *A Jazz Symphony* was designed to shock audiences with its aggressive and noisy renditions of black music. Whiteman called his music "super-jazz"; Antheil called his "hyper-jazz."<sup>3</sup> Like William Grant Still, Antheil used jazz to challenge concert hall norms.

Like Still and Edmund Jenkins, Antheil believed jazz could be the basis of American concert music. "America...needs new musical tools that do not fit any of the European

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<sup>1</sup> George Antheil to Mary Louise Curtis Bok, 19 October 1925, Box 1, Folder 5, George Antheil Correspondence with Mary Louise Curtis Bok, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Damrosch has been attributed as saying that Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin "made a lady out of jazz," in Merle Armitage, ed., *George Gershwin* (New York: Longmans, 1938), 189. This is because George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was advertised as "making an honest woman out of jazz" in the Whiteman Souvenir Program, among other places. See: F. C. Shang, "F.C. Coppicus Presents Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra of Twenty-Five in Their First Transcontinental Concert Tour, Season 1924-1925" (New York: Townsend & McNerney, 1924), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Whiteman, "What is Jazz Doing to American Music?" *The Etude*, vol. XLII, no. 8, August 1924, 524.

models," he wrote.<sup>4</sup> Jazz was the answer. Though some derided jazz by saying it was merely a method of playing any musical material, Antheil spoke out against this logic. In his published essays and compositions, he demonstrated that jazz was a legitimate and valuable tradition of music that had much to offer composers. Antheil participated in a public exchange on the topic in a 1928 issue of *The Forum*. He wrote an article entitled "Jazz is Music," while musicologist Sigmund Spaeth replied to Antheil's essay with "Jazz is Not Music." Antheil asserted: "Jazz is not a method of rhythmically distorting *any* music but a music capable of development into a serious art. It can be taken apart and reassembled symphonically and still remain jazz."<sup>5</sup> Jazz, he concluded, is made up of "highly individual elements of rhythm, harmony, and melody."<sup>6</sup> For Antheil, jazz was unique and it merited serious treatment by composers.

Antheil traversed modernism's dialectics quite differently than Still. Antheil exploited low culture to invigorate high culture. He forged a stark contrast between music categorized across the high/low divide, while Still responded to "the Jazz Problem" by eradicating that distinction. Antheil reinforced their differences at the precise point this divide intersected with race. Where Still made racially coded sounds difficult to discern, Antheil accentuated their differences through his extreme characterizations of jazz and classical music. Jazz, he believed, is not American; "it *is* black."<sup>7</sup> In *A Jazz Symphony*, Antheil, like John Powell, separates and juxtaposes so-called black and white music to accentuate what he perceived to be their fundamental differences.

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<sup>4</sup> George Antheil, "Jazz," 1922, pg. 2, Box 14, Folder 7, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> George Antheil, "Jazz is Music," *The Forum* LXXXI/1 (July 1928): 64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Antheil, "The Negro on the Spiral or A Method of Negro Music," *Negro Anthology*, ed. Nancy Cunard (London: Wishart & Co., 1934), 346.

Antheil's representations of blackness used the language of primitivist modernism much like Powell's. In his writings and compositions, Antheil consistently linked contemporary representations of black music to what he thought were the sounds and behaviors of an African savage. In an article on the history of black music, he wrote that it is "angular and elliptical...like the sculptures of the African Negroes themselves. In its original state in Africa, this music first impresses us as hard, wooden, incredibly complicated rhythmically, so that even the most involved Arabic music must seem tame in comparison."<sup>8</sup> However, Antheil used depictions of black primitivity not as a warning about the degradation of white civilization, as Powell did, but as a futurist ingredient to vivify concert music, to release composers of the burden of the past, and to place himself within the advance guard of modernist innovation.

Also like Still, Antheil boldly responded to "the Jazz Problem" through gendered language. Where Still challenged stereotypes of black women entertainers, Antheil reinforced stereotypes of black American men as being virile and licentious. Where Powell made connections to black sexuality in his very brief allusion to jazz at the end of his *Rhapsodie nègre*, Antheil's primitivist modernism is fundamentally about black masculinity and sexuality. He believed black musical rhythm came "from the groins, the hips, and the sexual organs."<sup>9</sup> By exploiting jazz's associations with black masculinity and sexuality, Antheil claimed he found the answer to America's reputation for having weak musical traditions.

As an American expatriate living in Paris, Antheil used his experimental take on jazz to set himself apart from his American and European compatriots. After studying with Ernest Bloch in 1920 and finding a patron—Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who founded the Curtis

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Institute in 1924—Antheil toured Europe as a concert pianist. He settled in Berlin where he met what his biographer Linda Whitesett called “the single most important influence on his compositional style in the twenties”: Igor Stravinsky.<sup>10</sup> He became ensconced in the futurist and dada movements, where he developed his approach to jazz. He then followed Stravinsky to Paris, became best friends with Ezra Pound, and moved in to the upstairs apartment of Sylvia Beach’s bookstore, Shakespeare & Company.<sup>11</sup> Antheil was embedded in the upper echelon of Paris’s bohemian art circles, but he clung to his American identity in his writings and music. He had become “Europe’s American Composer,” and he used his “hyper-jazz” to set himself apart from both his American and European peers.<sup>12</sup> It was equal parts primitive and futuristic—think pentatonic melodies and unconventional timbres drenched in persistent mechanical-like rhythms that pass by at an unthinkable quick speed. His compositions expunged what he perceived to be the sentimentality of popular music. Antheil thought his “hyper-jazz” was too experimental for Americans and too indigenous for Europeans but the key to America’s musical identity crisis that only he could solve.<sup>13</sup>

In his Carnegie Hall debut, he was returning from Paris to flaunt what he perceived to be the most modernist response to “the Jazz Problem.” On April 10, 1927, over 3,000 people crowded into Carnegie Hall to witness what newspapers were calling “the biggest event of the year,” thanks to Antheil’s steadfast promotional campaign. Musicologist Carol Oja called it “one of the most provocative expressions of American musical modernism in the 1920s.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Linda Whitesett, *The Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 10. Whitesett’s is the only biography on George Antheil, and it is astoundingly thorough. It was a fundamental resource for this chapter’s research.

<sup>11</sup> Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985), 150.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Lee, “George Antheil: Europe’s American Composer,” *The Reviewer* 1924: 267—275.

<sup>13</sup> Antheil, “Mama! (or The Americans Don’t Like Me),” 1 April 1925, Box 14, Folder 8, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 73.

Indeed, Antheil had promised ticket holders a sensation — “a dream of niggers, skyscrapers and glittering polished surfaces.”<sup>15</sup> Four pieces were performed: two small chamber works; *A Jazz Symphony*, played by the all-black Harlem Symphony Orchestra; and his *pièce de résistance*, the *Ballet Mécanique*, which featured a ghastly display of mechanical accoutrements — a player piano, an airplane propeller, electric bells, a siren — and an onslaught of percussion instruments, not to mention ten grand pianos. All four of the pieces performed that evening had allusions to or quotations of black popular music, but *A Jazz Symphony* was the most explicit — in part, because Antheil, like Still, had black jazz performers play the piece. Antheil asked W.C. Handy to conduct it. Handy contracted the Harlem Symphony Orchestra to perform it. Handy struggled with the music’s abrupt shifts in texture, tempo, and meter, so Antheil hired Allie Ross — a renowned violinist who led the danceband at Connie’s Inn and conducted the Harlem Symphony Orchestra from 1926 to 1927.<sup>16</sup>

The racial make-up of the concert hall’s audience also looked quite different than usual, and because Manhattan was not officially segregated, a mix of racial and class identities mingled, even if in distinct areas of the concert hall. Antheil had given tickets to the orchestra’s family members. In addition, Donald Friede, a literary promoter for Boni & Liveright and Antheil’s co-conspirator of this Carnegie Hall spectacle, invited all the Harlem and Greenwich Village writers he promoted. According to one critic, “the elite subscribers of the Beethoven Association and the Philadelphia Orchestra rubbed shoulders with habitués of night clubs and vaudeville artists.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Harlem socialites — Paul Robeson, Nora Holt,

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Prager, “A Riot of Music,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 April 1927, quoted in David Savron, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 209.

<sup>16</sup> “Harlem Symphony Orchestra Roster, 1926–27,” General Subject Files, 1843–2011, Folder 944, Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College.

<sup>17</sup> “Antheil’s ‘Ballet Mecanique’ Causes a Near Riot,” Scrapbook 1925–1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Oja, 92.



A'leila Walker—sat with accompanying white slummers Carl Van Vechten, Nathan Asch, and George Gershwin. Such proximity undoubtedly caused some discomfort and kept shoulders further apart than suggested, as another critic noted an isolated “box, even, of Negroes” in a sea of white bodies.<sup>18</sup>

Antheil's Carnegie Hall debut was ultimately perceived as a failure by critics. Headlines read: “Futuristic Jazz Greeted by Boos, Cat-Calls, Walkouts,”<sup>19</sup> “Ultra Jazz Raises Howls in New York,”<sup>20</sup> “Tin Pan Orchestra Failed to Please a New York Audience,”<sup>21</sup> and “Musical Ravings of Jazzist Win Nothing But Disrepute.”<sup>22</sup> According to the composer, however, it was not because of its shocking renditions of jazz or its mixed-raced audience or the all-black ensemble that played *A Jazz Symphony*. Apparently, the concert took a disastrous turn when the airplane propeller was inadvertently directed towards the audience.<sup>23</sup> “People clutched their programs, and women held onto their hats.”<sup>24</sup> One individual threw up his white handkerchief that he had placed a top his walking stick “in mock token of surrender.”<sup>25</sup> Members of the audience “started to leave in droves.”<sup>26</sup> The final linchpin in the Carnegie Hall

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<sup>18</sup> “The Riotous Return of Mr. Antheil,” *Literary Digest* (30 April 1927), Scrapbook 1925—1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Oja, 92.

<sup>19</sup> “Futuristic Jazz Greeted by Boos, Cat-Calls, Walkouts,” *Telegram*, Fort Worth, Texas, 11 April 1927, Scrapbook 1925—1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>20</sup> “Ultra Jazz Raises Howls in New York,” Scrapbook 1925—1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>21</sup> “Tin Pan Orchestra Failed to Please a New York Audience,” *Union Sun*, Lockport, New Jersey, 11 April 1927, Scrapbook 1925—1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>22</sup> “Musical Ravings of Jazzist Win Nothing But Disrepute,” *Journal*, Dayton, Ohio, 17 April 1927, Scrapbook 1925—1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>23</sup> According to Antheil they did not run the actual airplane propeller but used a sound machine to stimulate the sound, so it is possible this is an exaggeration or a response to the site of the item on stage. See Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1945), 192.

<sup>24</sup> Donald Friede, *The Mechanical Angel: His Adventures and Enterprises in the Glittering 1920's* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 60

<sup>25</sup> Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music*, 195.

<sup>26</sup> Friede, 60.

debacle was the mis-cuing of the fire siren, which, as conductor Eugene Goossens and Antheil forgot, needed one full minute of electrical energy before it sounded. “[T]he last bars of the *Ballet* crashed out. And then in the silence that followed there came the unmistakable sounds of a fire siren gathering speed.”<sup>27</sup> Critics called it the “Barnum and Bailey of music.”<sup>28</sup> Though Antheil would blame technology and not his shocking “hyper-jazz” or the exploitation of black bodies, the composer returned to Paris and publically disavowed jazz for the rest of the year. By 1928, however, he was working on his jazz opera, *Transatlantic*, for Otto Kahn.

Regardless of what caused its poor reception, the Carnegie Hall concert is one example of how composers used representations of blackness after the jazz explosion. In *A Jazz Symphony* Antheil navigates the modernist dialects of high/low, black/white, and past/present to create what I call techno-primitivist versions of jazz. He exploits the fact that jazz was associated with both the industrial sounds of modernity and the primitive rhythms of Africa to blend a primitivist and futurist aesthetic. The outcome is a stark aural difference between black popular and white classical music. His writings on jazz, which I discuss below, theorize about this aesthetic and his *Jazz Symphony* embodies it. To make jazz sound different and unintelligible, Antheil adopted the modernist language of the grotesque—a sibling of primitivism. I analyze his monstrous “hyper-jazz,” which was comically ugly and repulsively distorted. Finally, as I demonstrate in my conclusion, it was the composer’s gendered conceptions of popular music as feminine and jazz as masculine that radically set him apart from other symphonic jazz composers.

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<sup>27</sup> Friede, 61.

<sup>28</sup> “Antheil Gives Concert of Own Music,” *New York Journal*, 11 April 1927, Scrapbook 1925–1929, Box 36, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Before I turn to *A Jazz Symphony*, I depart from my previous chapters' focus on modernist dichotomies in order to discuss another aspect of Antheil's jazz that distinguished him from Jenkins, Still, and Powell. These three composers adopted jazz to address issues about race in Jim Crow America, and they used their compositions to speak to their respective race-based communities. *Levee Land* picked up the jazz controversy as it was understood by many black elite: a tension between Christian respectability and black entertainment. His composition featured scenes of church congregations and nightclub audiences—in essence, black communities. *Afram* also confronted this controversy but broadened the scope of its community to the world's black citizens. *Rhapsodie nègre* was a warning to Anglo-Saxon Americans about the threat of black cultural and economic advancement to white supremacy. Antheil's jazz is fundamentally about his individualized persona—what he would retroactively call the “Bad Boy of Music” in his 1945 autobiography. Jazz was intimately tied to his self-constructed identity as a rebellious white composer.

#### The Bad Boy of Music & His Techno-Primitive Invention

Central to Antheil's “bad boy” persona was his provocative use of black popular music in the concert hall. Antheil was a controversial figure; he staged riots in Europe, faked his death in Africa, and brandished a pistol at audiences.<sup>29</sup> Jazz enhanced his bad boy image. The jazz explosion ignited a controversy, and Antheil chose to side with the rebels. He exploited, even amplified, the music's associations with things that upset concert hall mores. Antheil needed jazz to be lowbrow, vulgar, sexually elicit, and black for it be shocking, for it to bolster his “bad boy” image. Like a good modernist, he claimed originality in this arena. At the age of

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<sup>29</sup> Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music*, 5–8, 169–172, Savron, 198–208.

thirteen he says he knew that “to be American in music, one had to be negroid. The Negro was then supposed to be the troubadour of our continent.”<sup>30</sup> He claimed his 1917 “Valse Profane,” was the very first composition “to propagate serious appreciation of jazz,” because it preceded Stravinsky’s “Piano Rag Music” by two years.<sup>31</sup>

Antheil wanted to be at the forefront of modern innovation. This led to many inventions and theories, which I briefly discuss here because they elucidate Antheil’s unparalleled approach to jazz and his radical views on race and gender. In his lifetime, he invented and patented a new musical notation system, an extended keyboard system, a secret communication system, and, along with actress Hedy Lamarr, a wireless torpedo system that prevented enemy interference during World War II.<sup>32</sup> In the 1930s, he developed two pseudo-scientific theories about female sexuality and criminal behavior based on his study of the works of eugenicist and endocrinologist Louis Berman.<sup>33</sup> In 1936, Antheil developed a taxonomy for men to determine how sexually promiscuous a woman might be before pursuing her. In an *Esquire* article called “Glandbook for the Questioning Male,” he categorized physiological features based on what he thought were connected to a woman’s glandular endocrinology.<sup>34</sup> He presented four categories of women. They are organized by the type of hormone secretions, the resulting physical features, and an “accessibility rating.” For example, the “pre-pituitary” is “very open to suggestion,” whereas the “post-pituitary” “will want to see

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<sup>30</sup> George Antheil, “The American Composer’s Heritage,” 5, Unpublished Manuscript, Box 14, Folder 1, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>31</sup> “Antheil Condemns Nationalism in Music; Says Modern Period Corresponds to 1830,” *Musical America*, 5 March 1927.

<sup>32</sup> Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music*, 308 and 327–332. Richard Rhodes, *Hedy’s Folly: The Life and Breakthrough Inventions of Hedy Lamarr, the Most Beautiful Woman in the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> For more on Louis Berman’s writings and theories, see: Louis Berman, *The Glands Regulating Personality: A Study of the Glands of Internal Secretion in Relation to the Types of Human Nature* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921); and C. Nordlund, “Endocrinology and Expectations in 1930s America: Louis Berman’s Ideas on New Creations in Human Beings,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 40:144 (March 2007): 83–104.

<sup>34</sup> George Antheil, “Glandbook for the Questioning Male,” *Esquire* (June 1936), 40.

the engagement ring first.”<sup>35</sup> In 1937, he wrote a crime-solving manual called *Every Man His Own Detective: A Study of Glandular Criminology*, in which he teaches readers the relationship between the physical features of the criminal and the type of crime. The criminals who committed what he called less-intelligent crimes—sloppy, unplanned, and motivated by passion, revenge, and drunkenness—had “kinky hair” and were “jazz-mad,” sex-driven, and ruggedly masculine. They were easy to spot, he claims, the “nigger in the woodpile.”<sup>36</sup>

Antheil brought this pseudo-scientific and inventive ethos to his jazz writings. In a futurist vein, Antheil prophesied about the music of the future, what he called a “mechanistic” music, and he wrote about it in many manifestoes. In particular, he theorized about a “fourth dimension”<sup>37</sup> of music, which was a new “physical comprehension and negotiation with space.” This fourth dimension was yielded by focusing on rhythm and time as the primary element in a composition. In an article called “Music in 2000 A.D.,” Antheil predicted that musical form will not be determined by shifts in tonality but “will find the point in their departure in TIME.”<sup>38</sup> Antheil’s experimentation with time was undoubtedly linked to his fascination with the rhythms of black popular music. Indeed, jazz led to this “NEW MUSICAL DIMENSION”<sup>39</sup> and “the tightening of a new-musico-rhythmic-sonority in space.”<sup>40</sup> The rhythmic precision of jazz was Antheil’s inspiration for the fourth dimension and “orchestral machines with a thousand new sounds” playing this new dimension were his futurist vision.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> George Antheil, *Every Man His Own Detective: A Study in Glandular Criminology* (New York: Stackpole Sons, 1937), 43, 45, 54, and 58.

<sup>37</sup> Antheil, “My Ballet Mécanique,” *Der Stijl* VI:2 (1924–1925): 141. It is worth noting here that Antheil distanced himself from the futurist movement and, in many of his writing, explicitly stated he was not one.

<sup>38</sup> Antheil, “Music in 2000 A.D.,” n.d., Box 14, Folder 8, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., emphasis supplied.

<sup>39</sup> Antheil, “Jazz,” *Der Querschnitt* I/II:2 (1922), 173, emphasis supplied.

<sup>40</sup> Antheil, “A Physical Possibility,” n.d., Box 14, Folder 11, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Like his other inventions and theories, Antheil's writings about jazz are rooted in sexist and racist stereotypes. As is the case with many modernists, the composer made a gendered distinction between different types of music: light and hard, sentimental and unsentimental. For example, he condemned Copland's music for being "lightly" and "sprightly," but he loved Stravinsky's "hard, cold, unsentimental" style.<sup>41</sup> Jazz fell in the second category, because of its relationship to what Antheil perceived as African primitivism. While this characterization is present in his 1920s essays, it is most lucid in an essay he published in the *Negro Anthology* in 1934. Compiled by political activist Nancy Cunard (and heiress to the Cunard Line shipping line), this 500-page tome sought to challenge racism through countless articles on black artistic and intellectual culture. In it, Antheil crafted a pseudo-scientific narrative about the origins of black music and its development in the United States. According to the composer, its African origin made black music the antidote to America's weak culture after World War I: "We needed at this time the licorice smell of Africa and of camel dung...the roar of the lion to remind us that life had been going on a long while and would probably go on a while longer."<sup>42</sup> He believed America was "weak, miserable, and anemic" and "needed the stalwart shoulders of a young race to hold the cart awhile till we had gotten the wheel back on." Blackness was the antidote to white (over)civilization, but he hones in on the figure of "the black man":

The great war had come and gone, we had been robbed and ransacked of everything; and we were on the march again. Therefore we welcomed this sunburnt and primitive feeling, we laid our blankets in the sun and it killed all of our civilised microbes. The Negro came naturally into this blazing light, and has remained there. The black man (the exact opposite color of ourselves!) has appeared to us suddenly like a true

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<sup>41</sup> Antheil, "Mama! (Or 'The Americans Don't Like Me')" 1 April 1925, Box 14, Folder 8, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Antheil, "Why 'Bad Boy of Music'?" 7, Undated Manuscript, Box 14, Folder 7, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>42</sup> Antheil, "The Negro on the Spiral or A Method of Negro Music," 350.

phenomenon. Like a photograph of ourselves he is the sole negative *from which a positive may be drawn!* Holding this negative up to the sun we see in essence that which so many eyes and ears have been trying to demonstrate on canvas, paper, and stone...the other side of that which we cannot see, but which we can put our arms around; the hard indestructible object with air around it, a world transferred over into the opposite world, a new start, the black man.<sup>43</sup>

As evidenced by this essay, Antheil held extreme views on racial difference and they were shot through with gendered stereotypes. These views are what led him to believe that an injection of musical blackness could revive stale concert traditions.

This primitivist perspective was linked to Antheil's futurism. Jazz was also masculine—"hard, cold, unsentimental"—because it mimicked the sounds of industrial machinery. Antheil's focus on jazz rhythm enabled him to join these two competing discourse in modernist art: primitivism and futurism.<sup>44</sup> For the composer, rhythm was both the first element of music to develop in ancient history and the sound of industrial modernity.<sup>45</sup> He compared the "rhythmic sense" of "the choruses from Congo" to the sounds of "highly civilized race masters of steel, mathematics, and engineering." Take what Antheil wrote about his *Ballet Mécanique*: "It is the Negro and Steel. It is civilization against the savage. Savage rhythms are ground down by enormous steel ones. It is the first that Negroes and skyscrapers have come into music."<sup>46</sup> For Antheil, jazz offered a way to amplify the sometimes jarring aesthetic of modernism through anxiety about black music. His techno-primitive brand of jazz collided the distinction between the industrial sounds of technology and the "uncivilized" sounds of black rhythm. While the organic labor of these imagined primitive bodies and the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>44</sup> Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 92 and 93; Savron, *Highbrow/Lowdown*, 204.

<sup>45</sup> Antheil, "Jazz is a Bore," Unpublished Manuscript, Box 14, Folder 7, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Antheil, "Jazz," *Der Querschnitt* I/II:2 (1922), 173; Antheil, "My Ballet Mécanique," *Der Stijl* VI:2 (1924–1925): 141; Antheil, "A Physical Possibility," Box 14, Folder 11, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>46</sup> Clarence Lucas, "Modern Music Modernized: The Awful Truth About George Antheil's Ballet Mecanique," *Musical Courier*, 15 October 1925.

automated labor of machines differ, Antheil found a disturbing similarity in their sonic representations which unnerved listeners.

All of these theories and inventions were linked to Antheil's identity as the rebellious American ex-pat in Paris, the bad boy of music. It was not jazz alone that could revolutionize concert music but what Antheil could do with jazz. He thought jazz was "banal"—the raw and obstinately sentimental expression of black folk, but he also thought it was the nucleus of "mechanistic" music.<sup>47</sup> Jazz could revolutionize modern music *only* through its transformation by "the rhythmic genius of a solitary innovator whose sense of [time] comes from the present moment of intricate machines...towers, new architectures, bridges, steel machinery, automobiles."<sup>48</sup> Stiff with the sounds of the piston, jazz was a white man's modernist game.

Antheil's "techno-primitive" versions of jazz enabled him to bypass the feminine associations of middlebrow music in the symphonic jazz of George Gershwin, "jazz classique" of Paul Whiteman, and even some of the "highbrow jazz" of John Alden Carpenter. Antheil's jazz was virile in comparison; it was hard like the machine. No where is this more palpable than in a letter Ezra Pound wrote to Antheil in 1925, presumably after Whiteman rejected *A Jazz Symphony* (Figure 4.1). Pound writes:

Gershwin is full of the softest and palest baby shit that ever shat itself into America  
BUT the damn kike has pulled off a ballet mecanique in I WANNA dance wiff YEW.  
Damn the yitt / same as Milhaud // let somebody else do the work and then exploit  
it...hollywood is balls for NOT USING MORE NIGGERS MORE OFTEN.<sup>49</sup>

Pound and Antheil were close friends and regularly sent each other letters that were riddled with profanities, vulgarities, and sometimes racist epithets. This private correspondence

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<sup>47</sup> In this essay, he uses the words "ragtime" and "jazz" interchangeably.

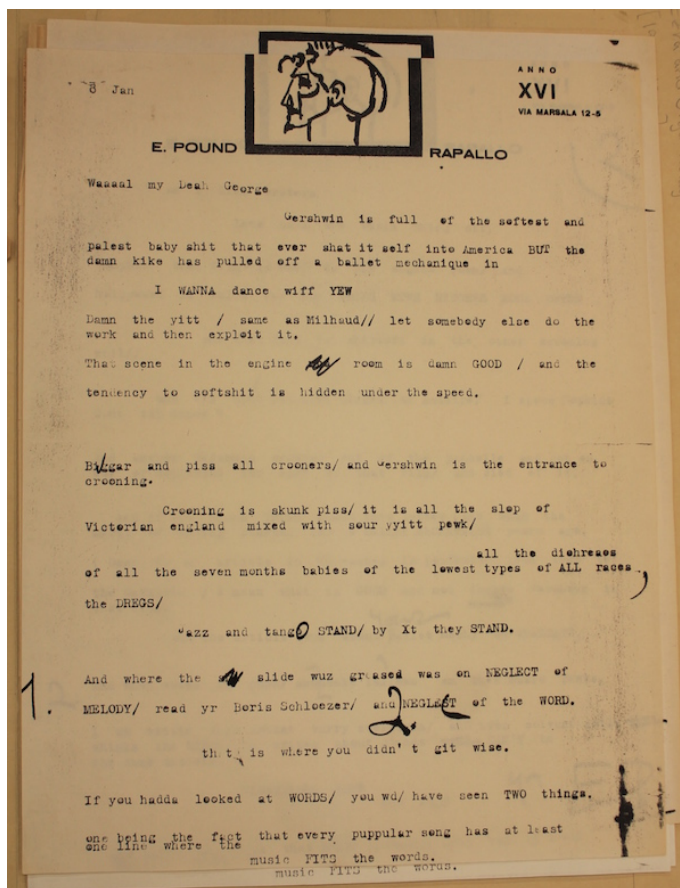
<sup>48</sup> Antheil, "Jazz," 172.

<sup>49</sup> Ezra Pound to George Antheil, 8 January 1925, Box 23, Folder 14, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., emphasis supplied.



speaks to the way in which they both viewed jazz. In a 1925 five-page unpublished diatribe against American concert music, Antheil, channeling his inner-Pound, wrote the following about recorded, commercial jazz: “Jazz, my dear friends....is.....GAGA.”<sup>50</sup> For these two ingénues, types of jazz were mapped onto a gendered and raced continuum. Antheil’s jazz was hard and black and Gershwin’s, soft and white.

Figure 4.1. Ezra Pound to George Antheil, 8 January 1925



Source: Ezra Pound to George Antheil, 8 January 1925, Box 23, Folder 14, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>50</sup> Antheil, “Mama! (or The Americans Don’t Like Me),” 1, emphasis supplied.

Antheil's techno-primitive aesthetic infused his Carnegie Hall debut. In fact, the entire event occurred because of the third movement of his *Sonata Sauvage*, "Niggers"—a depiction of blackness siphoned through futurist idioms (Figure 4.2). It was printed in a Parisian "little magazine," and Aaron Copland, one winter in 1927, played it at a party full of prominent Manhattan socialites.<sup>51</sup> Donald Friede, a white literary agent for Harlem Renaissance writers and eventually Antheil's co-conspirator in the Carnegie Hall debacle, was particularly inspired by it. He asked Antheil to come to the United States and once Antheil agreed, they hit the ground running with a promotional campaign using the same gendered and racialized language present in his writings about jazz. Headlines read: "AMERICA, AFRICA, AND STEEL" and "ANTHEIL'S COMING ALARMS POLICE." Ads promised audiences a *racial spectacle*. Antheil spoke most about his *Jazz Symphony*. He said his "hyper-jazz" was "a reaction toward Negro jazz as away from 'sweet jazz.'" <sup>52</sup> He advertised that W. C. Handy's orchestra was playing and the ads included Handy's sobriquet, "originator of the blues."<sup>53</sup> Antheil planned to shake up the white bourgeois concert-goers of Carnegie Hall with hot jazz performed by black musicians.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Donald Friede, *The Mechanical Angel: His Adventures and the Enterprises in the Glittering 1920's* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 44.

<sup>52</sup> "George Antheil: First American Appearance in a Concert of His Own Works," Program, Carnegie Hall, Sunday Evening, 10 April 1927, Programs and Promotional Materials, Box 34, Folder 3, George and Böske Antheil Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>53</sup> "Antheil Concert Entire Program is Announced," *Saturday Theatre Review*, 5 March 1927.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Prager, "A Riot of Music," *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 April 1927, quoted in Savron, 209.

Figure 4.2. “Niggers,” *Sonata Sauvage* (1922), George Antheil

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Source: George Antheil, “Musical Supplement: Sonata Sauvage,” *This Quarter* 1:2 (Autumn/Winter 1925–1926): 17–24.

### The Sights and Sounds of Race at Carnegie Hall

When the curtain rose for *A Jazz Symphony*, the audience “roared with laughter” at the site of the Harlem Symphony Orchestra and conductor Allie Ross in front of a huge, salacious backdrop.<sup>55</sup> Critics provide us with a bouquet of imagery from their descriptions of it.

Approximately thirty-five feet high and forty-five feet wide, the muslin canvas featured “two

<sup>55</sup> Friede, 59.

gigantic jazzboes painted in blacks and blues doing the Charleston.”<sup>56</sup> The girl was “in [a] negligée” “holding an American flag in her left hand, while the man clasped her ecstatically around the buttocks.”<sup>57</sup> The “ribald Harlem curtain”<sup>58</sup> was commissioned by Friede, designed by set designer Joseph Mullen, and constructed by Ward and Harvey Studios, which did Broadway set design. It was so big the blue fingernails of the dancers were apparently the adult-sized.<sup>59</sup>

The backdrop served Antheil’s bid for “hot” representations of black culture and captured, visually, the symphony’s crass depictions of black music. This minstrelsy-inspired caricature of black sexual expression framed the artistry, which this respectable class of musicians represented. The scale of these two dancers literally overshadowed the ensemble, undercutting the class distinctions these Talented Tenth artists expressed through their appearance, behavior, and performance. Similar to some minstrelsy stereotypes, the class pretensions of well-dressed black professionals were frustrated by an inability to escape the stereotypes of the black working-class.

Playing on the stage, caricatured on a backdrop, the presence of these black Americans reveal Antheil’s desire to highlight jazz’s associations with white fantasies about the black body. His music draws out this corporeal dimension too. The *Jazz Symphony*’s cacophonous soundscape evokes what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as the “carnavalesque”—a literary mode which subverts hegemonic style through humor and chaos.<sup>60</sup> But the work’s bizarre musical

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<sup>56</sup> Geraldyn Dismond, “The Ballet Mecanique as Heard in America,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 April 1927, pg. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Friede, 49.

<sup>58</sup> “Ballet Mecanique’ Busts Into N.Y. to Fervid Howls,” *Post*, 11 April 1927.

<sup>59</sup> Oscar Thompson, “Antheil Concert Results in Commotion, Mixed with Boredom, But No Rioting,” *Musical America*, 16 April 1927.

<sup>60</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

gestures align more with the aesthetic strategies of the grotesque.<sup>61</sup> Oxford English Dictionary defines “grotesque” as “comically ugly or distorted” or “incongruous or inappropriate to a shocking degree.” Literary critics Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund write: “Grotesque fiction...violates the laws of nature. Clear-cut taxonomies, definitions and classifications break down and, as a result, there is a built-in narrative tension between the ludicrous and the fearful, the absurd and the terrifying.”<sup>62</sup> Modernists used this strategy to disrupt bourgeois norms. In imaginary depictions of non-humans or less-than-human Others, modernists located ways to negotiate post-war social and cultural changes.

Antheil’s formations of jazz were indeed monstrous. They were hysterical, ugly, and even violent, at times. Using black performers to play his “hyper-jazz” was one way of gesturing toward this body-centered discourse.<sup>63</sup> In the next section, I unpack the compositional devices he used to shock listeners, how Antheil foreground the “low,” “black,” and “past” to obliterate the “high,” “white,” and “present” component of the modernist dichotomies. I discuss three aspects of *A Jazz Symphony* which drive both its techno-primitive

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<sup>61</sup> For more on this literary mode, see: Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex. The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987); Bernard McElroy, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989); Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Frances S. Connelly, ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, eds., *Modernism*, Vol. I (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007). For discussions of the grotesque in musicological research, see: Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Music Incongruities* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000); Elisabeth Le Guin, “‘One Says That One Weeps, but One Does Not Weep’: Sensible Grotesque, and Mechanical Embodiments in Boccherini’s Chamber Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55:2 (Summer 2002): 207-254; Julie Brown, *Bartok and the Grotesque: Studies in Modernity, the Body and Contradiction in Music*, Royal Musical Association Monographs 16 (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Yayoi Uno Everett, “Signification of Parody and the Grotesque in György Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre*,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 31 (2009): 26-56; and Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Blair Johnston, “*Salome*’s Grotesque Climax and Its Implications,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 36 (2014).

<sup>62</sup> Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Grotesque*, the New Critical Idiom Series (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the relationship between race and the grotesque, see: Leonard Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)

aesthetic as well as its horrifying distortions of black popular music.<sup>64</sup> These are 1) imbalance and asymmetry, 2) incongruity and juxtaposition, 3) lack and excess. I conclude this section with a discussion of hybridity. Just as Antheil sometimes fused classical music and jazz in this piece, he also segregated them to preserve an extreme sense of racial difference.

### Imbalance & Asymmetry

Like the disproportionate creatures of grotesque art, this symphony is lopsided. It lacks clear formal boundaries and thematic development is obscured. *A Jazz Symphony* mimics a piano concerto with three solo passages, evocative of improvisation. Like its nineteenth century French counterpart, these passages become ostentatious, but Antheil's are absurdly long and devolve into tone clusters. Some sections feel as if they may never end, and, at the same time, four-measure interpolations are peppered throughout (Table 4.1). The allusion of formal sections exists only because melodies reappear, but, often times, the themes are slathered so densely upon one another their development is distorted. As themes come and go, interrupted and fragmented, formal sections ooze into one another.

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<sup>64</sup> My analysis is based on the original 1925 version of this composition which was performed at Carnegie Hall on April 10, 1927. Antheil revised the piece in 1955. He removed the saxophones and doubled the violins, among other changes.

Table 4.1. Form, *A Jazz Symphony* (1925), George Antheil

Form	Meas	Description
THEME ONE	1	Theme One, "Jazz Band"
	17	Piano Solo
	47	Theme One Repeats, Never Returns
INTERPOLATION	61	Trading Solos, Improvisation
THEME TWO	68	Theme Two, "Vaudeville Jazz Parody"
	126	Piano "Cadenza"
	128	Theme Two Development
INTERPOLATION	141	Brief Piano Solo
THEME THREE	150	Theme Three, "Primitive Melody"
	191	Theme Three Development: Superimposition of Theme Two & Three
	220	Theme Three Development
	250	Theme Two Development with Charleston
	289	Climactic Superimposition of Theme Two and Three
JAZZ IMPROV	298	Jazz Solos, "Improvisation"
	357	Theme Two Returns as Banjo Solo
	395	Interruptions & Fragments, Trading Solos
WALTZ	428	Waltz, Piano Solo then Orchestra Repeats
INTERPOLATION	459	Jazz Improvisation, Trading Solos
	471	Marked Lento Section: Theme Three Fragments
WALTZ	497	Waltz Returns

The *Symphony* is bookended by two symmetrical sections. Both comprise entirely tonal material with tuneful melodies and straight rhythms. Their phrasing is balanced with sixteen measure periods,<sup>65</sup> and the tempos are moderate. The opening material is a sixteen-measure period of brass band and ragtime platitudes, exaggerated with tuba and trombone glissandos (Figure 4.3). Returning once more after a piano solo, it never appears again, occupying only

<sup>65</sup> The harmony in the first selection prevents it from being labeled a period, technically, since it only oscillates between tonic and dominant, as in a vamp, and does not have a chord progression or cadence. However, its melodic development and length communicate the asymmetrical progress of a period.

thirty measures of the *Symphony*. The subsequent formal section, however, lasts eighty measures with the first subsection consisting of the same six-measure motive over and over again. The composition becomes even more bloated with the third theme, which is developed for so long the music becomes directionless. Yet, at the very end, the sixteen-measure period of a whimsical waltz restores the work's formal balance. Antheil juxtaposes standard-sized sections with abnormal ones to create a symphony of disproportionate shape.

Figure 4.3. First Theme, mm. 1–12, *A Jazz Symphony* (1925), George Antheil

The musical score for the First Theme of *A Jazz Symphony* (1925) by George Antheil, measures 1–12, is presented in a full orchestral arrangement. The tempo is marked "Allegro vivace (spirited)" and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes parts for the following instruments:

- Oboe (Ob.)
- Clarinet (Cl.)
- Saxophone (Sop. Sax.)
- Alto Saxophone (Alto Sax.)
- Tenor Saxophone (Ten. Sax.)
- Trumpet (C Tpt.)
- Trombone (Tbn.)
- Tuba

The score shows the first twelve measures of the piece. The Oboe part begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The Clarinet part is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The Saxophone parts are marked with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The Trumpet part is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The Trombone part is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The Tuba part is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic and a series of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (ff, sim.), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (no gliss).





Source: All examples are images of George Antheil, *A Jazz Symphony* (1925 version), Weintraub Music Co., 1978, property of G. Schirmer Rental Library.

### Incongruity & Juxtaposition

The content of these imbalanced sections challenges normative aesthetics even more. In each one, Antheil splices and severs motives only to suture them together in absurd ways. Taking this tendency from Cubism and Dadaism, Antheil brings together disparate styles and clashing elements by manipulating texture and meter and by creating unpredictable patterns of repetition and change. This is most palpable in the second theme.

Antheil abandons the consonance of the first theme to craft a frantic, even violent soundscape for Theme 2. Short rhythmic units are articulated through a rapid tempo, dense textures, and fortissimo volumes. Extended instrumental techniques create a cacophonous backdrop. For example, the double bass scrapes its bridge with the bow on the quarter-note pulse in sync with tone clusters played by the piano's lowest notes. The pentatonic theme,

played by the piano, is derived from an octatonic collection. Like *Still*, Antheil exploits the ability of the octatonic scale to communicate jazz idioms. A second piano plays the same melody a half-step lower, creating the illusion of an out-of-tune, juke joint piano (Figure 4.4). This polyoctatonic theme comprises two three-measure motives derivative of one another. For two measures, the melody dances around the major pentatonic scale, primed in ragtime rhythms, before aggressively leaping downward an augmented fourth onto two accented half-note wails. This figure repeats, but the half-note declamations rise up, this time an augmented fifth above the first two half-note wails. These three-measure cells, rife with dissonant intervallic movement, are repeated eleven more times, each with different instrumentation and a slightly different texture.

With each repetition, the music builds momentum. The atonal eighth-note movement of the xylophone is supplanted by overblown trombone and tuba glissandos. After finishing its last repeat, the three-measure cell is fragmented and compacted into two-measures, shifting to a new irregular meter. Unpredictable rhythms continue as the section comes to a close. Six quarter note rests are slammed against two final iterations—like two beats on a large orchestral drum.

The image displays a page from a musical score for "A Jazz Symphony" by John Williams. The score is written for a large ensemble, including Xyl., Drum set, Banjo, Pno. Solo I, Pno. II, Vn. I, Vn. II, Va., Vc., and Cb. The music is in 4/4 time and is divided into two main sections: "a tempo" and "Vivace".

The "a tempo" section begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The instruments are arranged in a standard orchestral layout. The Pno. Solo I and Pno. II staves are highlighted with a red box, indicating a specific passage of interest. The Pno. Solo I staff features a series of chords and single notes, while the Pno. II staff plays a more active, rhythmic line. The other instruments provide a steady accompaniment.

The "Vivace" section begins with a key signature change to one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked "Vivace". The Pno. Solo I and Pno. II staves continue their respective parts, with the Pno. Solo I staff featuring a series of chords and single notes, and the Pno. II staff playing a more active, rhythmic line. The other instruments provide a steady accompaniment.

The score is written for a large ensemble, including Xyl., Drum set, Banjo, Pno. Solo I, Pno. II, Vn. I, Vn. II, Va., Vc., and Cb. The music is in 4/4 time and is divided into two main sections: "a tempo" and "Vivace".



## Lack & Excess

Grotesque bodies are negotiated in terms of their abnormalities—lacking a part here, exceeding the bounds of a part there. The black bodies caricatured in American minstrelsy were too, not to mention the primitivist depictions of the African savage. Scientific racism, which fueled Jim Crow segregation, roused discussions about black Americans lacking the qualities of the civilized races.<sup>66</sup> If audiences were not thinking about the imagery of these discourses, a 35-foot reminder was hanging behind the Harlem Symphony Orchestra to remind them.

Distortions and exaggerations like these dictated the sounds of Antheil's *Symphony*, especially in the section simulating improvisation just before the Waltz. As this section begins, the Tin Pan Alley style dissipates and the parodic flavor of the *Symphony* takes on a more complex character. A solo trumpet outlines a minor chord in a bluesy descent for forty-seven measures of unrelenting repetition and stasis (Figure 4.5). Final notes at the ends of phrases last fifteen beats. For example, the F-sharp is repeated and held for three measures and monotonously initiates each phrase (Figure 4.6). Score markings tell the performer to “use all the tricks of the trade and ad lib here,” to fill in the sonic space.<sup>67</sup> This gesture towards improvisation is, in effect, a composer driven escape from the score. The trumpet begins to flutter and add appoggiaturas to every note, eventually overblowing and yielding microtonal pitches (Figure 4.7). Just when the melody begins to repeat its motionless minor pentatonic descent, the clarinet starts playing in total opposition (Figure 4.8). We move from lack to

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<sup>66</sup> Cornel West, “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” in *Prophecy Deliverance!* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 47–68; Elazar Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Conceptions of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 11–53.

<sup>67</sup> It is not entirely clear what this would have sounded like on the evening of the Carnegie Hall premiere, but based on the extended duration of the same note, it likely had repetitive and static qualities.

excess. “Squawked like a chicken,” as directed by the score, the clarinet leaps through P11 playing high in its tessitura, frantically repeating the same melodic fragment. Exceeding the confines of Western notation, these strange and bizarre timbres evoked primitive conceptions of black musical expression. They sounded like the imitations of animal sounds heard on early jazz recordings such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band’s “Livery Stable Blues,” which was alternatively published as “Barnyard Blues.”

Figure 4.5. Jazz Improvisation Theme, mm. 298–303, *A Jazz Symphony*

The musical score is arranged in five systems. The first system includes parts for C Trumpet (1, 2, 3), Tuba (1, 2, 3), and Tuba. The C Trumpet part has a solo section starting in measure 298, marked with a fermata and the instruction "Use all the tricks of the trade and ad lib here." The Tuba part is marked *p*. The second system includes parts for Xylophone (Xyl.) and Drum set. The Xylophone part is marked *pp*. The Drum set part is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "B.D. T.-t. (hard stick)". The third system includes parts for Banjo (1, 2) and Piano (Pno. Solo I). The Banjo part is marked *p*. The Piano Solo I part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "(white and black keys)". The fourth system includes parts for Piano (Pno. II/III) and Piano (Pno. Solo I). The Piano II/III part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "(white and black keys)". The Piano Solo I part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "(white and black keys)".

Figure 4.6. Jazz Improvisation Theme, mm. 304–309, *A Jazz Symphony*

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for the Jazz Improvisation Theme, measures 304–309, from *A Jazz Symphony*. The notation is for C Tpt., Tbn. 1, 2, 3, and Tuba.

**System 1 (Measures 304–309):** The C Tpt. part begins with a melodic line in measure 304, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 305, marked *f* (forte). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 306, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 307, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 308, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 309, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment.

**System 2 (Measures 310–315):** The C Tpt. part begins with a melodic line in measure 310, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 311, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 312, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 313, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 314, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 315, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment.

**System 3 (Measures 316–321):** The C Tpt. part begins with a melodic line in measure 316, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 317, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 318, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 319, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part continues with a melodic line in measure 320, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment. The C Tpt. part concludes with a melodic line in measure 321, marked *p* (piano). The Tbn. 1, 2, 3 and Tuba parts continue with their rhythmic accompaniment.



Figure 4.7. Jazz Improvisation Theme, mm. 322–348, *A Jazz Symphony*

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with three staves for C Tpt. (1, 2, 3), Tbn. (1, 2, 3), and Tuba. The notation includes various musical elements:

- System 1:** Features a melodic line in the C Tpt. 1 staff with triplets and slurs. The Tuba part provides a steady bass line.
- System 2:** Continues the melodic development in the C Tpt. 1 staff, with more complex rhythmic patterns.
- System 3:** Shows further melodic and rhythmic evolution, with triplets and slurs still present.
- System 4:** Includes a dynamic marking "overblown (stuttered)" above the C Tpt. 1 staff, indicating a specific performance technique. The notation features slurs and dynamic markings.
- System 5:** Concludes the theme with a final melodic phrase in the C Tpt. 1 staff and a steady bass line in the Tuba part.

Figure 4.8. Jazz Improvisation Theme, mm. 349–352, *A Jazz Symphony*

### Hyper-Jazz: Hybridity and Segregation

Antheil made jazz ugly by wrapping it in egregious formations of modernist devices. Ragtime rhythms become metrical dissonance. Pentatonic melodies get distorted by tone clusters. And blue notes decontextualized by a whole-tone scale. This compositional strategy realizes his 1922 edict that jazz necessitated white mastery and control. Yet, even as Antheil fused jazz and art music, he wanted to make them sonically, and therefore racially, distinct. This is evident in his writings about jazz as well as in his compositional strategies.

In *A Jazz Symphony*, Antheil delineated clear differences between jazz and modernism by separating, even segregating, the two styles. Sometimes this was visible to the audience. Antheil played the piano for the Carnegie Hall concert. His presence in front of the Harlem Symphony Orchestra created a noticeable contrast. Additionally, his virtuosic solos carved out a white and modernist distinction from the jazz sounds played by the black ensemble.

Sometimes this distinction was embedded in the music, invisible to listeners. Take, for example, his first solo.

Recall the piece begins with brass and strings playing a pentatonic, melody replete with ragtime rhythms and brass band idioms. Before the introduction concludes with final movement to tonic, Antheil, at the piano, interrupts and solos for forty measures (Figure 4.9). Mirroring the distinction between black jazz band and white concert pianist, the piano solo is also segregated. The left hand establishes the harmony and rhythm of a ragtime accompaniment pattern, while the right hand plays an atonal descending sequence (Figure 4.10). Next, a series of seventh chords transform into a chromatic descending passage which quickly becomes rapid tone clusters. The left hand, however, maintains references to black music—this time, with pentatonic melodies played on the black keys. This racialized bifurcation is replicated as the passage devolves into rapid tone clusters climbing up the piano; the left hand plays the black keys and the right hand, the white keys (Figure 4.11). While it may seem overwrought to insinuate that piano keys represent America's color line, Antheil wrote a list of black music features in his article for Cunard's *Negro Anthology*, which included "a marked tendency towards the 'black' on the pianoforte."<sup>68</sup> He used this metaphor again, later in the essay, but, this time, with a reference to miscegenation: "Europe has been impregnated and impregnated deeply. We need no longer be surprised by our dark children. Music will no longer be all the white keys of the piano, but will have keys of ebony as well."<sup>69</sup> Antheil's relentless focus on racialized sounds in the *Symphony* could have made such an interpretation of the piano keys unavoidable for him.

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<sup>68</sup> Antheil, "The Negro on the Spiral," 347.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Figure 4.9. First Piano Solo, mm. 13–18, *A Jazz Symphony*

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Ob. 1, 2:** Oboe parts, measures 13-18.
- B♭ Cl. 1, 2:** Bass Clarinet parts, measures 13-18.
- B♭ Sop. Sax:** Bass Soprano Saxophone part, measures 13-18.
- E♭ Alto Sax:** Alto Saxophone part, measures 13-18.
- B♭ Ten. Sax:** Bass Tenor Saxophone part, measures 13-18.
- C Tpt. 1, 2, 3:** Cornet parts, measures 13-18.
- Tbn. 1, 2:** Trombone parts, measures 13-18.
- Tuba 3:** Tuba part, measures 13-18.
- Xyl:** Xylophone part, measures 13-18.
- Drum set:** Drum set part, measures 13-18.
- Banjo 1, 2:** Banjo parts, measures 13-18.
- Pno. Solo I:** Piano Soloist part, measures 13-18.

The piano soloist's part begins in measure 13 with a melodic line. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *but clear*, and *cresc.* for the piano soloist. The orchestral parts provide accompaniment with various instruments including woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

Figure 4.10. First Piano Solo, mm. 19–32, *A Jazz Symphony*

Figure 4.10 shows the first piano solo for measures 19–32 of *A Jazz Symphony*. The score is for Piano Solo I and consists of four systems. The first system shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system continues the melodic line with a 'Sua...' marking. The third system features a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking and a '10:4' tempo marking. The fourth system includes a 'loco' marking and a '14:4' tempo marking.

Figure 4.11. First Piano Solo, mm. 33–46, *A Jazz Symphony*

Figure 4.11 shows the first piano solo for measures 33–46 of *A Jazz Symphony*. The score is for Piano Solo I and Piano II. The first system shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A red box highlights a section of the first system with the text 'with flat of hand (white keys)' and '(black keys)'. The second system includes a 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking. The third system includes a 'loco' marking. The fourth system includes a 'l. arm' (left arm) and 'r. arm' (right arm) marking. The fifth system includes a 'l. arm' and 'r. arm' marking.

However, the division between black and white music materialized more clearly on the formal scale, when the composer—the only white man on stage—interrupted the black ensemble and drowned out the left hand’s black sounds with atonal passages. This section, among others, underscored the already unequal relationship between Antheil and the other performers on stage, between white modernism and jazz that made his hybrid monster so shocking to 1920s audiences.

The racial inequality of the Jim Crow racial order exceeded the confines of the Carnegie Hall performance. That evening performers and audience members attended a party several blocks away at Club Deauville, where Friede and Antheil hoped to continue their interracial experiment. Like other nightclubs in the theatre district, this one catered to elite whites, who sought alternative experiences through darkness, alcohol, nudity, and bawdy entertainment. That night, however, the club featured entertainment by a black dance band led by W.C. Handy, and, according to Carl van Vechten, “*all the Negroes*” attended.<sup>70</sup> The proximity of black and white dancing bodies, which the Carnegie Hall prohibited, led some white attendees to revolt. “The very dark, and married, Paul Robeson danced with the very white, and single, Muriel Draper,” causing “forty to leave in protest.”<sup>71</sup> The threshold of white tolerance was exceeded. While some enjoyed the all-black ensemble performing, at a distance, on stage, others could not withstand these same class of men dancing with white women. This threat was embodied and magnified by interracial dancing to nightclub music. Unintentionally or not, the afterparty was the linchpin of the racial scandal that Antheil and Friede devised.

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<sup>70</sup> Carl van Vechten to Fania Marinoff, 12 April 1927, Carl van Vechten Papers, New York Public Library; quoted in George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 247. Also mentioned in: Carl Van Vechten, *The Splendid Drunken Twenties: Selections from the Daybooks, 1922-30*, edited by Bruce Kellner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 160.

<sup>71</sup> George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 247.

## Dada & the Lowbrow: (White) Popular Music, (Black) Jazz

Antheil used distorted jazz idioms through grotesque forms to establish a sharp difference between blackness and whiteness, highbrow and lowbrow. He used melodic dissonance, abrupt shifts in texture, and animal-like noises to signify African primitivity in his representations of blackness. He wrapped these in the sounds of industrial rhythms to portend the mechanistic music of the future.

His jazz was hard to listen to. Its sonic violence led some audience members and music critics to take action, to refuse to be subjected to it. Harlem socialite A'Leila Walker (also the owner of Madame C.J. Walker's beauty manufacturing company, hostess of parties at and resident of Harlem's famous Dark Tower, and inspiration for the main character in Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*) reportedly said, "Thank goodness, I will be dead before this becomes the vogue."<sup>72</sup>

Antheil's violent depictions of jazz came from the dada and futurist movements he encountered in Berlin. Especially drawing from the dada movement, Antheil made the lowbrow unintelligible to erode classical music norms, repulsive to extirpate the bourgeois power of the highbrow.<sup>73</sup> His alignment with these movements explains why his violent depictions of jazz were reliant on gender stereotypes as they intersected with race. Both of these moments were hyper-masculine, dominated by men expressing anxiety about gender, and fueled by rhetoric eschewing anything associated with femininity.<sup>74</sup> Tristan Tzara, for

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<sup>72</sup> Geraldyn Desmond, "The Ballet Mecanique as Heard in America," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 April 1927.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the relationship between popular culture and the dada movement, see: Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mud Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Michael White, *Generation Dada: The Berlin Avant-Garde and the First World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> Cinzia Sartini Blum, "Marvellous Masculinity: Futurist Strategies of Self-Transfiguration through the Maelstrom of Modernity," in *Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet, 87–102 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

example, declared in one of his most famous manifestos: “we aren’t sentimental.”<sup>75</sup> This stance is evident in Antheil’s descriptions of Sonata No. 2 for violin, the first piece played at the Carnegie Hall concert. To his good friend Stanley Hart, he wrote about its quotations of white folk and popular music tunes:

...Fifteen minutes of complete disillusion, and death to all that was called music. I pride myself with the fact that most of the themes are not original. ‘In the shade of the Old Apple Tree, Hoochee Chooch, Darling, you are growing older,’ and all the most vomiting, repulsive material possible. This sonata is like Joyce, and like spew — nevertheless it is electrical. For the first time in the history of the concert stage, the world is allowed to gaze rapturously into an open cunt.<sup>76</sup>

These popular tunes were modernism’s Other — the threat of mass culture to high modernism, the threat of the commercial to the artistic, the threat of the feminine to the masculine. Antheil did not quote these turn-of-the-century tunes as a nostalgic gesture to the past; he hung them out to dry in hopes of traumatizing his audiences, forcing them to confront their ugly desires for commercial culture.

Jazz was commercial music. It was mass culture. But Antheil talked about it differently. Even though he treated it with the same sort of futuristic violence to upend concert hall values, jazz, for Antheil, was redeemed through its associations with black masculinity. Its rhythms had been baked in the “broiling sun...of the jungle...for thousands of years.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, jazz was “only crude material...banal musical fragments” requiring rearrangement by a composer to draw out its vigor.<sup>78</sup> That composer was Antheil and that is precisely what he set out to do in *A Jazz Symphony*.

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<sup>75</sup> Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto” [1918], in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 307.

<sup>76</sup> George Antheil to “Dearest good old Stan[ley Hart],” [4 May 1925?], Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Catherine Parsons Smith, “‘A Distinguishing Virility’: Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music,” in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, edited by Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 97.

<sup>77</sup> Antheil, “The Negro on the Spiral or A Method of Negro Music,” 346.

<sup>78</sup> Antheil, “Jazz,” *Der Querschnitt* I/II:2 (1922), 173.



## Conclusion

Between the years of 1917 and 1925, concert jazz materialized and became an established American tradition, a vogue. John Powell and Edmund Jenkins were among the first composers to experiment with jazz before it was widely popular to do so. They extended U.S. concert traditions, which had already expressed interest in depictions of black culture in high art. At the same time, they signaled a change in depictions of black culture. Subtle references to jazz appear in *Rhapsodie nègre* (1918) and *Charleston: A Folk Rhapsody* (1917–9), but they are surrounded by older representations of blackness including the Spirituals and minstrel songs. In a brief allusion to jazz idioms, Powell associated the music with what he perceived to be the licentiousness of black people, whereas Jenkins used characteristics of jazz as a general stylistic ingredient in a rhapsody of different black musical forms. Thus, it is no surprise that the increasing popularity of jazz in the early 1920s pushed Jenkins and Powell in opposite directions. Jenkins found in jazz a way to bring his international black politics into sharper focus in his later compositions. Powell found in jazz evidence to launch a full-scale white supremacist campaign. Nonetheless, both Powell and Jenkins helped lay the foundation for the Symphonic Jazz Era.

While Powell and Jenkins very carefully played with the modernist dichotomies at work in early symphonic jazz, Antheil and Still threw them into disarray in 1925. In the wake of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and the explosion of commercial jazz, they brought the intersection of the high/low and black/white dichotomies to bear on radical compositional statements. Antheil, in *A Jazz Symphony*, used outrageous caricatures of black popular music to inject classical music with vitality. Conversely, Still challenged the distinction between jazz idioms and high modernist aesthetics. In *Levee Land*, he eviscerated the aural differences

between music perceived as white and music perceived as black. Antheil stratified these categories. He even segregated them.

By exploiting the intersection of these two dichotomies, all four composers engaged with one of modernism's core tensions: using representations of the past to innovate contemporary trends. Jenkins started his career by relying on depictions of black culture that stretched back to the middle of the nineteenth century but, after becoming an international dance band leader, he used jazz to symbolize modern black politics and to imagine a future of black solidarity and equality. Powell used modernist compositional strategies to portray what he believed were the regressive traits of black Americans. Still's music was an injunction demanding listeners to hear the modernist aesthetics of contemporary black culture. Antheil also envisioned a future of modernist concert music based on jazz but his music was rooted in primitivist depictions of black culture. Taken together, these four composers elucidate how representations of the past and present were so essential to modernist art. These representations, though, were legible through race. The compositions of Powell, Still, Antheil, and Jenkins demonstrate the extent to which jazz, specifically, and portraying blackness, generally, were at the heart of American modernism.

Yet, the connection between jazz and modernism runs deeper. Not only did they both have reputations for ushering in a new era of noisiness, they erupted and flourished around the same time. As jazz replaced the Spirituals and ragtime in the concert hall, the U.S. modernist movement took off. The Victor Company made \$51 million in 1921.<sup>79</sup> Paul Whiteman sold 2 million copies "Whispering" by 1923. That same year, the performance careers of a younger generation of composers ignited and modernist institutions and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 152.

publications formed.<sup>80</sup> Though many American composers did not explicitly draw on jazz in their music, the symphonic jazz vogue was integral to the growth and visibility of post-war modernism. Composers grappling with the sounds of blackness drove its development.

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<sup>80</sup> For more on the formation of modernism in the 1920s, see: Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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