

Jazzbandism

Sorrow Songs (1893)

Soon after Dvořák's observation in 1893 that American music, to be organically original, must be based on Negro folk tunes, cultural nationalists confront a racial quandary, as ragtime soars into a national pastime. Genteel gatekeepers might accord black spirituals some respect, but for white composers to ground themselves in an inherently alien idiom can't help but be noticed and even conflated with the pervasive minstrelsy of the popular stage. Besides, Dvořák's *völkisch* exhortation raises another thorny question: to what extent can "the folk" consist of a denigrated minority? Are former slaves in America somehow comparable to central European gypsies? As ragtime is succeeded by jazz, the problem of folk music persists, adding the exacerbating element of a commercialism so conspicuous and invasive that one might question whether any "folk" had ever been involved with jazz at all. Can folk music be commercialized without compromising its integrity? Is jazz authentic folk music or merely accented with folk elements?

In many quarters such questions will seem beside the point, given that Dvořák is not alone in singling out the "sorrow songs" as indubitably authentic. The prestige of spirituals invariably marks secular music like jazz as inferior. Furthermore, surveys and collections of black folk music stress the authenticity of rural folkways, implying that jazz is just a commercialized urban music with a superficial resemblance to its country cousins (including the blues—which themselves have even more conspicuously negative class connotations). What's unique about jazz, and what it shares with ragtime, is its role as the first thoroughly cosmopolitan music of African Americans.

A Futurist Word (1913)

In 1913 the *San Francisco Bulletin* quizzically notes a “futurist word which has just joined the language.”¹ The word is *jazz*. It’s unclear if the reference is to Italian futurism (an exhibition of futurist painting won’t be held in San Francisco until 1915), but modern art movements provided handy comparisons. “The ferment which produced the innovations in the other arts which we call ‘jazzy’ were at work in Europe long before its influence was felt here. Germany had her Sandburgs and Steins before we did,” Henry O. Osgood informs readers of the first American book on jazz, *So This Is Jazz*, in 1926. Historian Eric Hobsbawm, under the nom de plume Francis Newton, will observe that in Europe “jazz had the advantage of fitting smoothly into the ordinary pattern of *avant-garde* intellectualism, among the dadaists and surrealists, the big city romantics, the idealizers of the machine age, the expressionists and their like.” A German commentator after the Great War greets jazz as a “musical revelation, a religion, a philosophy of the world, just like Expressionism and Impressionism.” Robert Goffin fancies jazz to be “the first form of surrealism,” informing French readers that “what Breton and Aragon did for poetry in 1920, Chirico and Ernst for painting, had been instinctively accomplished as early as 1910 by humble Negro musicians.”

For white aficionados in the Roaring Twenties—those like Hoagy Carmichael who will figure out how to get hold of “race records”—the Negroes would have names. But they were nameless in Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century, when Picasso and Apollinaire were photographed in nonchalant poses with African masks and fetishes. Gelett Burgess, confronting cubism in 1908, is spooked by these “primitive grotesques.” “Men had painted and carved grim and obscene things when the world was young. Was this revival a sign of some second childhood of the race, or a true rebirth of art?” In coming years, the enthusiasm with which jazz is received in Europe can be precisely correlated to the passion for primitivism enlivening the *avant-garde* from cubism through surrealism. As for the public at large, *jazz* will prove to be so mercurial a term that it only sporadically refers to music. The audience

¹Research by Gerald Cohen indicates that the term *jazz* was used almost exclusively in sports contexts. The *San Francisco Bulletin* (March 6, 1913) profiles the local baseball team the Seals before a game with the Chicago White Sox. “A grain of ‘jazz’ and you feel like going out and eating your way through Twin Peaks,” the article suggests. Intriguingly, the report says the team has “trained on ragtime and ‘jazz’ and manager Del Howard says there’s no stopping them.”

for jazz precedes its consumers, in part because “the Jazz Age was born almost before there was jazz.”

Explosion in the Shingle Factory (1913)

In his *Seven Arts* editorial on the prevalence of popular music in American life (December 1916), James Oppenheim bemoans commercialism but resists elitist indignity, emphasizing instead the need to balance “prophecy and philosophy and vulgarity in art.” Contributing to a *Seven Arts* symposium on ragtime in 1917, Hiram Moderwell detects “something Nietzschean in its implicit philosophy that all the world’s a dance.” Ragtime has indeed set the world dancing. Despite condemnation by the American Federation of Musicians in 1901, ragtime had become the primary agent for the domestic boom in piano sales; and after 1910, when the Turkey Trot and other animal dances swept the country and then the world, ragtime extended its dominion from parlor to dance hall. Much earlier, the introduction of new dance forms like the eighteenth-century minuet and the nineteenth-century waltz had aroused suspicions of libertine opportunism; but ragtime was to bring with it the extra weight of race relations. Even so, ragtime will establish dignified career opportunities for African Americans, facilitating professional opportunities onstage and in the touring “syncopated orchestras” for which the transition to jazz will be merely a change of label to meet public expectations.

Terminological confusion notwithstanding, ragtime and jazz will frame the entrance of African Americans into dominant white cultural tastes, particularly in leisure activities like social dancing, cabaret, and show music. Ragtime is ubiquitous by the time Americans are introduced to modernism, the Armory Show being mounted as the nation is in thrall to Irving Berlin’s hit tunes “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” and “Everybody’s Doin’ It Now” (actually Tin Pan Alley homages to ragtime, not rags themselves). As crowds surge through Armory Hall, gazing in bewilderment at the optical assault engineered by French painters (often several decades earlier), the aural contagion of ragtime is inescapable just down the street. Stuart Davis, one of the American artists transformed by the impact of the Armory Show, finds himself confronted with “an objective order in these works which I felt was lacking in my own. It gave me the same kind of excitement I got from the numerical precisions of the Negro piano players in the Negro saloons, and I resolved that I would quite definitely have to become a ‘modern’ artist.”

The perceptual bewilderment occasioned by Armory Show pieces like Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" presages the response to jazz at the end of the war, when the public faces an aural onslaught commensurate with the cognitive dissonance of modern art. What initially seems the acoustic counterpart to Duchamp's "explosion in a shingle factory" will prove easier to assimilate once the initial novelty wears off and the apparent barrage of noise turns out to conform to danceable measures.

Fox Trot (1914)

Not long before Dada is hatched at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Hugo Ball notes in his diary: "Art must not scorn the things that it can take from Americanism and assimilate into its principles; otherwise it will be left behind in sentimental romanticism." As harbingers of radical change, Americans become suitable emblems of a cultural chic with which the artistic avant-garde struggles to keep pace. An American student studying abroad makes his initial vanguard mark in England as a proponent of Americanism in a college debate at Oxford in 1914. "I pointed out," T. S. Eliot writes home, "how much they owed to Amurrican culcher in the drayma (including the movies) in music, in the cocktail, and in the dance. And see, said I, what we the few Americans here are losing while we are bending out energies toward your uplift...we the outposts of progress are compelled to remain in ignorance of the fox trot." Understandably, Eliot will later assimilate jazz as a flourish of his verbal calling card, assuring an English friend in 1920 that, in future visits, "it is a jazz-ban-jorine that I should bring [to a soiree], not a lute."

Reviewing Satie's *Parade* in its 1919 London performance, F. S. Flint wonders what to call it: "Cubo-futurist? Physical *vers-libre*? Plastic jazz? The decorative grotesque?" Terminological uncertainty is rampant among those documenting current events. At the Cabaret Theatre Club in London, the Turkey Trot and Bunny Hug are thought of as "Vorticist dances" in 1914, in a milieu described by Osbert Sitwell as "a super-heated vorticist garden of gesticulating figures, dancing and talking, while the rhythm of the primitive forms of ragtime throbbed through the wide room."

On the continent, jazz arrives as necessary accessory of the new dances—an extension, in effect, of the animation with which the musicians play. "They enjoy themselves with their faces, with their legs, with their shoulders; everything shakes and plays its part," exclaims an enthralled Yvan Goll. A Soviet

enthusiast notes that while the music is meant for dancing, the musicians' exertions amount to a dance of their own, transforming the jazz band into a "mimetic orchestra." "Jazz was not just a musical performance, it was also a visual show," recalls Michel Leiris. "It was almost a cross between a concert and a ballet, almost like a total work of art or music which overtly included gestures."

In both Europe and America jazz is often taken to mean dancing, not a kind of music. The dance audience being considerably larger than the listening



audience, recordings are meant for dancing—a point made conspicuous on their labels, in which jazz releases bear a generic indicator: "Fox trot." An industry agent in 1914 reports that "dance music records have proven a great business builder" to a country "dippy" over the new dances." "To Jazz or not to Jazz—that is the question": meaning, to dance or not to dance the latest dances. Most prominent are the animal dances ("as if Uncle Remus had

joined high society") with names like the Puppy Snuggle, the Terrapin Toddle, and the Pollywog Wiggle. And there are plenty of other dances: the Kitchen Sink, the Lemon Squeeze, and the Formaldehyde Flop suggest by their names the adaptability of nearly anything for dance fashion. This epidemic of novelty dances carries jazz with it around the world. "Jazz music has aroused the desire to dance to an extent unknown in the previous history of mankind," English music critic R. W. S. Mendl marvels in *The Appeal of Jazz* (1927). But "its almost incredible popularity is its own undoing," he reflects. "It is a vicious circle."

Cabaret Voltaire (1916)

Ralph Ellison, trying to place the significance of Minton's Playhouse for the bebop revolution, imagines it "is to modern jazz what the Café Voltaire in Zurich is to the Dadaist phase of literature and painting." In fact, the main difference between European and American responses to jazz (apart from the historical fact that jazz derives from racially denigrated Americans) is that the avant-garde is a pervasive phenomenon across Europe when jazz appears.

Giving “free play to the spontaneous manifestations of the subconscious” was a goal shared alike by jazz musicians and the avant-garde, Goffin suggests, summoning Cendrars, Apollinaire, Joyce, de Chirico, Magritte, Ernst, and Dalí to make the case.

New Orleans’ Mardi Gras has no civic corollary in Zurich, but within the confines of Hugo Ball’s nightspot, carnival is a nightly occasion. “The Cabaret Voltaire was a six-piece band. Each played his instrument, i.e. himself, passionately and with all his soul,” Hans Richter will recall. Richard Huelsenbeck “was obsessed with Negro rhythms . . . His preference was for the big tomtom, which he used to accompany his defiantly tarred-and-feathered ‘Prayers.’” Huelsenbeck “pleads for stronger rhythm (Negro rhythm),” Ball notes in his diary. “He would prefer to drum literature into the ground.” The walls of Cabaret Voltaire are covered with modern art in the primitivist mode, including Marcel Janco’s masks (“zig-zag abstracts,” says Arp). (Janco will title a painting “Jazz 333” in 1918.) The performances include music hall piano, recitations of *Lautgedichte* (or sound poetry, which strikes listeners as “African”), and the relentless boom of Richard Huelsenbeck’s drumming (“banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano, pale as a chalky ghost”). The insistent drumming accompanying recitations of sound poetry at Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 is the phantom sensation of jazz, almost but not yet arrived with the American Expeditionary Force.

Ultra Modernity (1917)

Despite George Antheil’s hyperbolic assertion, in 1922, that “jazz is not a craze—it has existed in America for the last hundred years,” jazz will strike most people as quintessentially modern (even if, for many, it’s a kind of modernistic or hectic ragtime). Robert Coody, in his vanguard journal *Soil*, shovels ragtime and syncopation into a modernistic heap with skyscrapers, steam shovels, and Gertrude Stein. At the same time (1917), Walter Kingsley, evoking the sensation of jazz, urges his readers to “imagine Walter Pater, Swinburne and Borodin swaying to the same pulses that rule the moonlit music on the banks of African rivers.” “The laws that govern jazz,” he explains, “rule in the rhythms of great original prose, verse that sings itself, and opera of ultra modernity.”

As it happens, the terms *modernity* and *modernism* come into focus just about the time that jazz becomes available as one among many instances of what these terms might mean. Fred Lewis Pattee gives the title *Tradition and*

Jazz (1925) to his collection of literary criticism on such topics as “The Old Professor of English: An Autopsy.” In this context, jazz means defiance of the passé. A European might acclaim jazz as “the characteristic folk music of modernity because America is the most modern country of the world,” but for the African American Alain Locke, jazz is “the dominant recreational vogue of our time . . . the most prolonged fad on record,” having become “diluted and tintured with modernism.” Locke’s prickliness on the subject of jazz is not shared by Langston Hughes, despite Hughes’ lucidity on that “period when the Negro was in vogue” and all that implied. Fashionable primitivism precedes The Cotton Club. For the 1918 Carnegie Hall premiere of John Powell’s *Rhapsodie nègre*, a program note dedicates the work to Joseph Conrad in appreciation of *Heart of Darkness*. In music, time can flow backward and forward at once. “Why not play a boogie-woogie when Wotan walks across a rainbow in Valhalla?” asks Arnold Schoenberg.

The literary set had grown accustomed to hedonistic allures back in the heyday of Decadence. But when artifice is thrown off by *vers libre* and imagism, some will see in the new poetry even more egregious symptoms of regression. In 1919, Louis Untermeyer’s *The New Era in American Poetry* proclaims the virtues of a rediscovered vernacular (“our poets are coming back to the oldest and most stirring tongue,” he notes, rediscovering “the beauty, the dignity, I might almost say the divine core, of the casual and commonplace”). “We can hear its counterpart already in the performance of any Jazz band,” a reviewer of Untermeyer’s anthology contemptuously remarks. The *New York Times* agrees: “Jazz is to real music exactly what most of the ‘new poetry,’ so-called, is to real poetry,” and both are the work “not of innovators, but of incompetents.”

Casino de Paris (1917)

The fox trot pounces on English soil in the summer of 1914 and crosses the Channel to Belgium the next year. French writer Paul Morand encounters jazz in London in 1916, and French chanteuse Gaby Deslys, having spent the first couple years of the war in New York, returns to the Casino de Paris with a jazz band in 1917, where Louis Mitchell and the Jazz Kings will hold court from 1918 to 1923. By 1917 jazz is a regular topic of the British as well as the American press. The next year, a music hall called The Empire features Madame Power and her jazz-dancing elephants, and music hall entr’acte ensembles in general begin calling themselves “jazz bands.” The Parisian avant-garde begins con-

scripting black American soldiers for fetes. Strange instruments are suddenly popular, and an advertisement for banjo lessons pointedly asks, “Are you black? NO. Is it necessary to be black in order to play banjo? NO.”

George Antheil will appreciatively consider how “Negro music made us remember at least that we still had bodies which had not been exploded by shrapnel.” Having coincided with the devastation of the Great War, jazz is received with a singular intensity in Europe. Mendl repeatedly emphasizes the connection in *The Appeal of Jazz*, calling jazz a “musical alcohol” precisely calibrated to relax soldiers on leave from the front. Its intensity is homeopathic, “a reflection of the elemental instincts of war fever.” Because of the hostilities, the Germans will not experience the fox trot and the tango until 1918. After the armistice, jazz is instantly infused with the aura of global cosmopolitanism, and the British market is beguiled by tunes bearing titles like “Hawaiian Jazz” and “Hong Kong Jazz” by early 1919.

Europe (1919)

The sonic transition from war to peacetime is heralded by drums and brass: “the echoes of the last bugle were being drowned out by the music of innumerable jazz bands.” As often as not, members of these bands had served in the Harlem Hellfighters, an African American military band led by James Reese Europe. Having obtained a sound musical training under the tutelage of Dvořák’s black protégé Harry Burleigh, Europe organized the Clef Club Orchestra, the first black ensemble to play Carnegie Hall (1912). His subsequent association with Vernon and Irene Castle (1913–1915) has made him famous as the musical impresario behind the prewar international dance craze.

When the Hellfighters return to Harlem after the war, a million people throng the boulevards to greet them. In a 1919 performance in Chicago, the outfit offers a sonic rendition of trench warfare, “On Patrol in No Man’s Land,” with houselights extinguished to heighten the acoustic menace. This synaesthetic tactic had been pioneered before the war by the Italian futurists, evoking combat with vocal extemporizing and noise machines (*intonorumori*); English art critic Clive Bell will later cite Italian futurism as “the nearest approach to a pictorial expression of the Jazz spirit.” Europe records “On Patrol in No Man’s Land” after signing a record contract as “Jazz King,” shortly before his murder at the hands of a band member in 1919.

Considering that Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet won't even begin their recording careers until 1923, and in light of his fame, if Europe had lived, the entire course of jazz might have been different, not least because its "King" could have been black. By the time Paul Whiteman lays claim to the title, Europe has been dead five years and almost everything white people know as jazz has derived from other whites. So some lexical justice is served by recalling the impact on both sides of the Atlantic of a black pioneer named *Europe*.

Cloud Pump (1919)

In 1919 Erwin Schulhoff moves from Prague to Germany and—after composing a few vocal symphonies in the manner of Strauss and Mahler (with the expressionist titles *Landschaften* and *Menschheit*)—he begins absorbing Dada into his music, including *Sonata Erotica*, a five-minute orgasm for female soloist, and *Wolkenpumpe* (Cloud Pump), based on Hans Arp's poem. Berlin Dadaist Georg Grosz introduces Schulhoff to jazz, and he takes to it immediately, writing *Fünf Pittoresken* in 1919, which includes a fox trot and a ragtime. "I have a tremendous passion for the fashionable dances and there are times when I go dancing night after night," he confides to Alban Berg, "purely out of rhythmic enthusiasm and subconscious sensuality; this gives my creative work a phenomenal impulse, because in my consciousness I am incredibly earthly, even bestial." Soon he's busy integrating jazz into his *Suite for Chamber Orchestra* (1921), *Piano Concerto* (1923), and numerous solo piano works widely performed by the composer himself, including *Partita* (1922), *Cinq études de jazz* (1926), *Esquisses de Jazz* (1927), and *Hot Music* (1928). Schulhoff's itinerary is typical of the time in its rapid transition from Dada to jazz—and, as with many other composers (Stravinsky, Hindemith, Martinů, Poulenc, Milhaud), from jazz to neoclassicism. For this generation, jazz marks a ritual threshold over which avant-garde composers have to pass, to pass *as* avant-garde.

Matthew Josephson fears that this European enthusiasm, in its "search for fresh booty," is poised to devour jazz and its fashionable accessories "on the hunch that the world is on its way to being Americanized in the next two decades." In a 1924 *Vanity Fair* article, "American Noises: How to Make Them, and Why," Gilbert Seldes envisions the tributary flowing into a global delta: "The discoveries which jazz has made, the freshness of tones—the American noises, in short—will be snapped up by composers in and out of the jazz movement. It is the musical world at large which will ultimately gain by the

coming of jazz.” The gains, in retrospect, cannot be restricted to signature jazz touches that crop up in a few bars of otherwise conventional art music, much as those touches acclimated the public to novelty effects in serious setting (just as, in *The Waste Land*, “O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag” bursts the bubble of neurotic obsessions in “The Game of Chess”). If, for many, jazz serves as a momentary phase of musical modernism, by the end of the twenties it will become an elective part of the idiomatic arsenal—even to such an extent that Wilhelm Grosz, composer of the jazz ballet *Baby in der Bar*, will pointedly avoid jazz idiom when setting poems by Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer for *Afrika-Songs*, his “*Jugendstil* spirituals” of 1930.

Drums (1920)

The English variety paper *Encore* notes in October 1917 that “America is a country which apparently delights in the invention of weird bands.” The writer goes on to identify the jazz band as the “latest fruit” of this propensity, which he takes to be a motley of instruments meant to showcase a drum set. “The object of a jazz band, apparently, is to provide as much noise as possible,” writes a bewildered London critic in the *Times* in 1919, with drums perceived as pre-eminent noisemakers. At this point, in Britain, drum kits are called “jazz-sets”; in Germany drums are called “the jazz.” Trombonist Leo Vauchant complains of Parisians they “didn’t know that jazz band meant an orchestra.” Even a *New York Times* article of 1921 asserts that “the drum-and-trap accessories . . . constitute the jazz, the rest merely band.” In his first exposure to jazz, Michel Leiris finds each performance “dominated almost from beginning to end by the deafening drums.” In 1927 R. W. S. Mendl ruminates on the “crude, weird sounds” of the previous decade: “the jazz effects were produced by motor horns, rattles, squeaky whistles, tin cans, almost any means of making crude and raucous noises: usually these horrible embellishments were served up by the drummer, who was a veritable host in himself, or *homme-orchestre*.” Confusion about the role of noise persists. A Russian band led by N. N. Foregger, billing itself as a “noise orchestra” (following the Italian futurist “art of noises”), is paired with an official Soviet jazz band, the First Eccentric Orchestra, yet critics detect no difference between them. Even sympathetic musicologists associate jazz with noise. As Leon Werth bluntly states (in a passage approvingly cited by André Coeuroy and André Schaeffner in their 1926 book *Le Jazz*), “Jazz is not a matter of argument or doctrine. Jazz is rhythm and noise.”

The first time he hears jazz, Jean Cocteau pricks up his ears like a horse (“j’ai dressé les oreilles d’un cheval de cirque”). “It’s my latest hobby,” he declares. “Jazz goes to my head better than alcohol.” Cocteau instantly decides that “Impressionist music is outdone . . . by a certain American dance which I saw at the Casino de Paris” driven along by the mesmeric drummer, “a barman of noises under a gilt pergola loaded with bells, triangles, boards, and motor-cycle



horns. With these he fabricated cocktails, adding from time to time a dash of cymbals.” Little wonder that Cocteau himself will take up drumming, along with the painter Picabia and composer Milhaud. How can artists resist this “miracle of ubiquity and cohesion,” as Goffin calls jazz drumming. Expatriate American artist Man Ray sets himself up as a one-man band, personifying “l’homme orchestre.”

For combat veterans, of course, drums connote other sorts of bombs. Francesco Berger, reporting on a jazz concert for *Monthly Musical Record* in 1919 (calling the drummer a “‘utility’ man”)

compares the aftermath of a performance to a battlefield: “when, after the final crash of a Piece, you look round for the *débris*, and are preparing to count the dead and wounded on the ground, you find the players mentally, if not physically, as cool as cucumbers, tuning their instruments for their next encounter, or exchanging with one another critical remarks on Puccini or Debussy.” Cocteau watches dancers submitting to a “hurricane of rhythm and beating of drums . . . which left them quite intoxicated and blinded under the glare of six anti-aircraft searchlights.” The martial affinities linger on long after the hostilities have ceased. Le Corbusier’s musical brother, Albert Jeanneret, reviews Billy Arnold’s band in *L’Esprit nouveau* (1923): “This percussion, an arsenal which entirely unlocks the rhythm. Synesthesia. The entrails are stimulated.” Here at last is music to match Picasso’s “canvas of exorcism,” *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

Jean Cocteau’s Parisian Jazz Band (1920)

For many Europeans after the war, a replenishing hedonism and an artistic renaissance seem equally alluring, and possibly identical. “If you accept the Jazz Band you should also welcome a literature that the intelligence can savor like a cocktail,” declares Cocteau. Michel Leiris embraces jazz precisely because it’s *not* an art in the French sense. Cocteau agrees: “The music-hall, the circus, and American Negro bands, all these things fertilize an artist just as life does. To turn to one’s own account the emotions aroused by this sort of entertainment is not to derive art from art. These entertainments are not art. They stimulate in the same way as machinery, animals, natural scenery, or danger.”

In his multimedia quest to become a barman of noises, Cocteau (a cultural “pimp” in the view of Hans Stuckenschmidt) concocts his own Parisian Jazz Band with composers Georges Auric and Francis Poulenc, photographed performing at the opening of a Picabia exhibition at Galerie La Cible in 1920, a precarious moment when the various factions of Parisian Dada are splitting up. The Parisian Jazz Band promptly disbands to make the point: “plus de jazz” (this phrase will be misconstrued by historians overlooking the context, in which it clearly means not only “done with jazz” but also No More Dada). Auric writes the eulogy—“jazz woke us up,” he concedes, but “from now on let’s stop our ears so as not to hear it”—and Cocteau derisively cites “a certain decor, a certain racket, a certain Jazz-bandism” as “the froth of the modern movement.” Milhaud, also announcing its demise, characterizes jazz as “a salutary storm after which the sky is purer.”³ Cocteau elaborates: “This noise drenches us, wakens us *to do something else.*”

Because of its mobility as a generic signifier of modernism as such, jazz is affixed to pronouncements and activities of the avant-garde like a decal on a traveler’s bag, in the process becoming inseparable from fashion cycles affecting the absorption of jazz in social circles. Robert Goffin notes the paradox that “in New Orleans and in Chicago at this time jazz was the preserve of the dregs

³ Writing in *Modern Music* in 1925, Milhaud will recall that “during the winter of 1921–22 in America, the journalists regarded me with scorn whenever I made out a case for jazz. Three years later jazz-band concerts are given in New York, there is talk of a jazz opera at the Metropolitan, banjo classes are organized in the conservatories. Jazz is comfortably installed with official sanction.” But, he adds, “Here it is finished.” If jazz appears “finished” in Paris, in Germany it’s just taking off: the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt will start offering instruction in jazz in January 1928. Such developments prompt Theodor Adorno to prophesy the end of jazz: having “become stabilized as a pedagogical means of ‘rhythmic education’ . . . the last muted trumpet, if not unheard, will soon die away without a shock.” Adorno will suffer the disappointment of his erroneous diagnosis to the end of his life.

of the population. In Paris the cream of society went to hear [Louis] Mitchell." For a fashionable primitivism, the role of jazz would be to "apply the rouge on civilization." But, Yvan Goll laments, "these primeval people will be used up fast!"

Clive Bell takes up the cry of Cocteau's group, "Plus de Jazz," for a presumptuous obituary in the *New Republic*. Bell understands "jazz" to be a stylistic affect of modernism in all the arts (although he uses the verbs *jazzing* and *ragging* interchangeably). Jazz is a broad cultural movement that derives "from music—the art that is always behind the times." Its most distinctive feature, syncopation, "has given us a ragtime literature which flouts traditional rhythms and sequences and grammar and logic." Writing just before F. Scott Fitzgerald breaks the champagne of his prose over the official hull of the Jazz Age, Bell conflates jazz with modernism as such, by which he means postimpressionism, symbolism, primitivism, and neoclassicism, exemplified by T. S. Eliot and Igor Stravinsky. With his "black and grinning muse," Bell proposes, "Mr. Eliot is about the best of our living poets, and, like Stravinsky, he is as much a product of the Jazz movement as so good an artist can be of any." Bell professes some admiration for Woolf, Cocteau, and Cendrars, but he is dismissive of Joyce, who "rags the literary instrument" with "talents which though genuine are moderate only."

Bell's applications epitomize the role of jazz as "a scavenger symbol for the cultural traumas of the 1920s," revealing "the secret of modernism" by lending "perceptual coherence to phenomena as discrete as European musical avant-gardism, bureaucratic and scientific rationalization, even contemporary faddism." Bell is hardly alone in thinking of jazz and modernism as labels for any deliberate distortion of the conventional. Dismissive of immediate gratification and sensationalism, Bell seizes on the term *jazz* to signify any cultural phenomenon that's superficially exciting but lacks staying power: "Jazz art is soon created, soon liked, and soon forgotten. It is the movement of masters of eighteen." As this is written, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong happen to be eighteen, and ahead of them lie careers that will take jazz far beyond whatever even its masters can foresee.

Concerts Wiéner (1921)

At the Salle des Agriculteurs on December 15, 1921, Jean Wiéner features Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* in a program that includes Stravinsky's *Rag-time*,

works by Satie and Poulenc, and a “Blues (danse américaine)” played by Wiener himself, a gifted pianist with a unique ability to get the keyboard to *swing*. *Pierrot* is partly repeated as an encore and will be reprised three more times in the next year as the “Concerts Wiener” become a regular feature of Parisian musical life. During the twenty-two concerts of the series from 1921–25, Stravinsky will be by far the most frequently performed, followed by Satie; but the Concerts Wiener also become a major forum for members of Les Six (particularly Milhaud who, in December 1923, accompanies Wiener to Brussels, where the composer lectures on “New Resources in Music: Jazz-band and Mechanical Instruments” with the pianist providing examples). Repeated offerings from Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg rotate regularly with the blues and the French school. Manuel de Falla, Sergei Prokofiev, and Heitor Villa-Lobos are also included in programs that balance solo piano pieces, vocalists, and chamber works with compositions for mid-size instrumental ensembles like Stravinsky’s *Symphonies for Wind Instruments* and *Concertino*, or Milhaud’s *Le Boeuf sur le toit*.

Schoenberg’s *Pierrot* is hardly new, having premiered in Berlin in 1912, with Stravinsky, Ravel, and Puccini in attendance. On the train from Switzerland to Berlin to attend the première, in fact, Stravinsky worked on the score of *Le Sacre du printemps*. He will later call *Pierrot lunaire* “the solar plexus as well as the mind of early-twentieth-century music,” but Wiener’s concerts enact a dual vision, in which New Orleans shares the role of solar plexus with Vienna. The program note for the inaugural performance of *Pierrot lunaire* included a caption from Novalis: “One can imagine tales where there would be no coherence, and yet associations—like dreams; poems that are simply euphonious and full of beautiful words, but with no meaning or coherence whatever.” The *fin-de-siècle* poems by Belgian symbolist Albert Giraud hardly fit that description, but Schoenberg’s use of *Sprechstimme* instead of outright singing brings Novalis’ meaning into focus through an unlikely vehicle. “*Pierrot lunaire* left a beam of moonlight on the shoulder of twentieth-century music that could not be brushed off,” Allen Shawn writes, alluding to the eighteenth poem in Schoenberg’s cycle, “Der Mondfleck.” Why even try? But it might be scratched by fingers deft enough to look for blue notes—or, as Michel Leiris surmised, “the articulation of the unnamable itself.”

When *Pierrot lunaire* premieres in New York in 1923, it will be conducted by Louis Gruenberg, an American who had studied with Busoni in Germany and was among the first composers to absorb the jazz idiom for classical music

(even if his fellow student Kurt Weill will win greater recognition). As jazz establishes a beachhead, it seems, *Pierrot lunaire* somehow hoists the banner. But why and how? The commedia dell'arte tradition from which *Pierrot* derives flourishes in the circus, the carnival, the fairground, cabaret, and puppetry and gets launched with *oomph* into the concert hall with Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1912). Populist settings give *Pierrot lunaire* a natural affinity with the African American roots of jazz, certainly in the minds of European artists like Schoenberg, who from 1901–03 had been musical director of Ernst von Wolzogen's Überbrettel variety theater in Berlin, modeled on the Chat Noir in Paris, the venue crucial to Satie's development back when Alfred Jarry was still alive. One of Schoenberg's colleagues in Berlin, actress Albertine Zehme, asked him to write *Pierrot lunaire* for her, confident in both his music-hall experience and his eagerness to compose for a voice that would neither sing nor speak, but oscillate feverishly between the two. With a minimal ensemble (piano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello), the instruments pursue destinies of their own, among which glance the sonorities of a voice that alternately croons, whispers, soars, and shrieks. "Die Klänge werden hier ein geradezu tierisch unmittelbarer Ausdruck sinnlicher und seelischer Bewegungen," Schoenberg says: "The sounds here become practically animalistic, immediate expression of sensual and emotional movements." This variety is compounded by the sequence of songs, setting in motion a steady series of musical forms, including passacaglia, canon, and fugue, not to mention waltz and polka. It lacks only a blues, a rag, a fox trot; but the coming decades will take care of that.

Shuffle Along (1921)

In 1921 the first musical performed, produced, written, and directed by blacks becomes a Broadway hit. *Shuffle Along* commercially validates the African American roots of jazz. Written by ragtime composer and pianist Eubie Blake with Noble Sissle (a veteran of James Reese Europe's band), *Shuffle Along* launches the careers of Florence Mills, Paul Robeson, and Josephine Baker. Baker is one of many cast and pit band members who decide to remain in Europe after the show tours there to great acclaim in 1923. Baker becomes a Parisian institution in short order, incarnating for many "all the prestige of Negro statues." Paolo Buzzi, Italian futurist, greets her emergence from some imaginary realm of the jungle and the savannah in his poem "Josephine Baker":

Your voice announces you;
 perfume of an exotic flower:
 melody languor furor
 of the savannah
 and the jungle.
 And you no longer live in distant worlds . . .
 And I see you. You're mine!

Dear, like Eve and Adam to the serpent!
 In the syncopations of insolent jazz
 Venus *caffè latte*
 divine
 infinite
 among the mulattoes
 sculpted
 to the brilliant drum beats.
 You, with your great mouth
 full of melody:
 rhythmic comma which doesn't know how to sit still
 like the freest spirit in the hereafter.

Baker is “a creature neither inhuman nor superhuman,” e. e. cummings observes, “equally nonprimitive and uncivilized.” “A synthesis of animal voluptuousness, as young and alive as jazz itself,” exclaims Georges Sim (a.k.a. Simeon). France is convulsed by the incandescent spectacle of this “wand of golden flesh,” as cummings puts it. Parisian fashion capitulates to the Baker vogue: women slick down their hair with Bakerfix and wear Baker perfumes. Count Harry Kessler locates Baker’s dancing “somewhere between the jungle and the skyscraper. The same is true of her music, jazz, in its color and rhythm. It is ultraprimitive and ultramodern.” As Ezra Pound’s musical ally, Katherine Ruth Heyman, points out in *The Relation of Ultramodern to Archaic Music* (1921), “the new always has its origin in the archaic.”

The Sin in Syncopation (1921)

Jazz and modernism alike are “postwar”: a combination of “cynicism and hedonism that came out of it like a cloud of gas they can’t issue masks for.” By 1921 it’s clear the jazz craze isn’t a bubble of postwar hijinks, but here to stay. It’s the presentation of the future, day by day, minute by minute, coincidentally shar-

ing its moment with newfangled technological and commercial phenomena, records and radio. So jazz, for most people in the twenties, is “the tinkly distillations of toothpaste troubadors.” But what is it—a sales pitch, a spoof, a kind of music, an attitude toward life, a mannerism, cheap vulgarity, or a spirited emotional impulse? “The word ‘jazz,’ in its progress toward respectability, has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of war.” F. Scott Fitzgerald’s famous pronouncement is retrospective, looking back at 1921 ten years later, but this handy summary will be pressed into service as the definitive juncture between jazz and modernism for the rest of the century. Fitzgerald pinpoints the sources of controversy that made jazz responsible for upending genteel America with its Gilded Age proprieties. The transit of American womanhood from rosy-cheeked Gibson girl to bob cut flapper is borne along by the ceaseless incitement to sensual dancing by “jazz” (whatever that is); moral watchdogs assume sex to be the allegorical gist and practical outcome. In the milieu of 1920—haunted by the Red Menace, the increasing visibility of blacks in cultural life, and the emancipation of women that combines suffrage with sexual liberation—jazz is thought to incite licentious abandon. But if jazz is merely distasteful to some—“a low streak in man’s tastes that has not yet come out in civilization’s wash”—for others it’s a political menace, an “expression of protest against law and order, the bolshevik element of license striving for expression in music.” Even fans might exclaim over a hot solo “going Bolshevik.” The performers’ abandon (particularly in hokum and novelty acts) can’t help but seem uncouth. On the assumption that black musicians lack formal training, whites will think of improvisation as the last resort of those who don’t read music—or more to the point, an opportunity for untutored whites themselves to pass musical muster. These musical hooligans are suspected of technical improprieties, just as the very presence of novelty instruments in the “spasm bands” has the innuendo of illicit activities (after Prohibition in 1919 jazz and speakeasies become virtually synonymous). “Fanatic syncopations hurl the torch of lust into the halls,” exclaims Eugene Jolas in a poem from his collection *Cinema*. No wonder *Ladies Home Journal* asks, in its August 1921 issue, “Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?”

Tales of the Jazz Age (1922)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age* is published in 1922, when American magazines like *Soil* and *Broom* are promoting jazz as literary propeller for the vanguard. Even as far away as Belgrade there's an avant-garde journal called *Dada Jazz*. How can popular writers resist the injection of period flavor into their otherwise old-fashioned moralizing tales? In England and America jazz is fodder for sensationalism. *The Great God Jazz* by H. M. E. Clamp luridly depicts a girl "held down to the step of the dance by the black paw of the anthropoid ape" until she's overcome by "the fascination that wound itself round her like the coils of a big black snake." May Christie, popular author of women's romances, takes a peek at Americans on the Riviera in *The Jazz Widow*. Black Tuesday puts an end to fast living in this moral fable, but music as such plays no part in the story. *Jazz Mad* by Svend Gade, on the other hand, depicts the conflicting claims on the modern musician, beguiled by popular and financial success with novelty music but beholden to the redemptive culture of the classics. In Germany, fiction writers like Gerhard Schumann and Edwin Erich Dwinger capitalize on the exotic dangers jazz represents for the Aryan spirit, while more serious writers like Hermann Hesse and Hans Janowitz portray the wintry European soul roused to sentience again by this exotic injunction from the dark continent.

The quintessential jazz baby of the twenties may be Mary Butts. "I am beginning to know what is wrong with the time," she writes in her journal. "And many of the things we do are not wrong, it is our way of doing them. They are very good things—Paederasty & jazz & opium & research." Her own search for "the lever, the new synthesis, or vision or fact" informs her novel *Armed with Madness* ("a brilliant and subtle, if rather chaotic expression of this Age of Jazz [which] might be described as Henry James in the idiom of 1928," writes one reviewer. *Armed with Madness* is actually a grail fiction set on the remote Dorset coast, a group portrait of the postwar generation—one of whom appears in another's nightmare of trench warfare "wearing his shrapnel helmet"—playing "the Freud game" (free association), sunning themselves in the nude, and taking their gramophone outdoors, "playing to the wood after lunch, to appease it and to keep their dancing in hand." To that end, they send for an American they've met abroad, "whom they had ordered like a new record from town." As far as records go, they listen repeatedly, and in vain, to "Oh, Lady Be Good!"

National Anthem (1922)

Popularity and crass commercialism aside, jazz is nothing if not fashionable. Juliette Roche evokes an elegant euphoria in which “the woodwinds of the Jazz-Bands / the gin-fizzes / the ragtimes / the conversations / contain every possibility.” Mário de Andrade, in Brazil, observes

The high tide of the gleams from the mansions . . .
 The colored jazz band . . . The rainbow of perfumes . . .
 The clamor of coffers stuffed with lives . . .
 Naked shoulders, naked shoulders, lips heavy with adultery . . .
 And rouge—mushroom of putrefactions . . .

Besotted in the wee hours, Paul Morand considers the plight of a modern Saint Sebastian, for whom

A quarter past three, the stupid hour's at hand.
 Through the roof-tiles a pastry of drinks
 the jazz-band tickles my feet.

Theo Van Doesburg has a whimsical vision in which “les elephants dansent / une Jazz-Band dans mon Coeur”—as though Hugo Ball's elephants from Cabaret Voltaire prance gaily to a fox trot.

“In the period of great license that followed the hostilities, jazz was a sign of allegiance, an orgiastic tribute to the colors of the moment,” Michel Leiris will recall. Likewise, for Hans Janowitz, “it was the time of savage joys, crazy rascals, and wild pranks within the realm of propriety: in short, the whole program of the era was called ‘Jazz.’” Kurt Weill takes it in stride, finding no discontinuity: “Jazz is just as precisely the outward expression of our time as the waltz was of the outgoing nineteenth century.” Ernst Krenek employs jazz in his music to capture “the collective feeling of the age,” achieving spectacular success with his jazz opera *Jonny spielt auf*. Dutch cabaret star Louis Davids seizes the spirit of reckless abandon in his song “Mother is Dancing”: “Crying for your mother, baby? / Baby, give it up. / Mother needs her daily whoopee . . . / Mommy craves that mean ol’ banjo / And the saxophone.” As Sadakichi Hartmann can’t help but notice, “the Zeitgeist moves to the tune of jazz.” A character in J. Hartley Manners’ 1922 play *The National Anthem* protests the popularity of jazz: “Why it’s ridiculous. London is jiggging to it. . . . Paris is deafened by it. It has become the National Anthem of Civilization.” “It is vul-

gar,” a writer in the *Nation* concedes in 1922, “but it is healthily frank—as frank as the conversation of a group of young people who cleanly and intelligently discuss birth control.”

As an early premonition of what will later develop as sonic social wallpaper (copyrighted as Muzak), jazz is the main ingredient of whatever people learn to call modern after the Great War: “In the jazz music what remains of the creative force of this sterile time unfolds: the genius of the eclectic, the cocktail mix of souls.” Jazz is worthy because unpretentious, its transience an assurance of ongoing vitality, the sign of an art gone beyond the compulsion to validate itself in terms of masterpieces. Other witnesses might offer different menus, but the ingredients share a common stock of associations. In the USSR it’s a useful suffix; people speak of *theatrical jazz*, *cinema-jazz*, *extra-jazz*, *joy-jazz*, *circus-jazz*, and so forth. Rarely translated, English terms like *sex appeal* and *cocktail* and *jazzband* form an incipient Esperanto for a floating international stylistic currency. Given such a panoply of associations, the music itself is conceptually indeterminate. Some take it to mean orchestrated ragtime; for others it’s hokum and novelty revues. *Paris-Midi* in 1925 associates the jazz band with sports cars, Gillette razors, and the bob cut in women’s hairstyles. Skyscrapers, comic strips, and chewing gum also evoke the land of jazz. Finding himself in Moscow in 1927, Walter Benjamin will be intrigued by its popularity, but because it epitomizes the capitalist bourgeoisie, it’s “kept behind glass, as it were, like a brightly colored poisonous reptile.” Five years earlier, jazz had not yet fallen under official suspicion. In the 1922 manifesto for their theater group, Factory of the Eccentric Actor, the Eccentrics hail as allies:

In literature—the cabaret singer, the cry of the auctioneer, street language.

In painting—the circus poster, the jacket of a cheap novel.

In music—the jazzband (the commotion of a Negro orchestra), circus marches.

In ballet—American song and dance routines.

In theatre—the music-hall, cinema, circus, cabaret, boxing.

For Vladimir Mayakovsky’s book of poetry, *About This*, published in Moscow in 1923, the Constructivist artist Alexander Rodchenko provides a jazz-band montage of dancers, liquor, and the poet’s head on a punch bowl tray. In Mayakovsky’s magazine *LEF* in 1927, one writer recalled the Odessa scene of 1922 swarming with “Futurist poets, actors, artists, and jazz-bandits.”

Insofar as jazz is thought to be characteristically American in some approved sense, it can be tolerated and even pinched on its upstart cheek with the twinkle in the eye of an uncle with a past condoning a nephew's youthful escapades. Incarnating unbuttoned postwar swagger, jazz appears "very American in its snap, speed, smartness, and cosmopolitan character." Jazz is just the thing for an energetic nation, the brass band announcing its coming-of-age on the world stage—"a genuine contribution to the gaiety of nations," as an English admirer puts it.

Le Corbusier, the leading exponent of modernism in architecture, declares the New York skyline "hot jazz in stone and steel." But others respond warily to the "sound of riveting," as H. L. Mencken pungently calls it. Waldo Frank thinks "jazz syncopates the lathe-lunge, jazz shatters the piston-thrust, jazz shreds the hum of wheels, jazz is the spark and sudden lilt centrifugal to their incessant pulse. Jazz is a moment's gaiety, after which the spirit droops, cheated and unnurtured. The song is not an escape from the Machine to limpid depths of the soul. It is the Machine itself! It is the music of a revolt that fails. Its voice is the mimicry of our industrial havoc." Contemporaneous with *The Waste Land* and *Manhattan Transfer*, early jazz is skyscraper primitivism incarnate, its atavistic energy lubricating the machine age. And now, with the advent of recording technology, this world historical threshold has a *soundtrack*.



Bankruptcy Jazz (1923)

Young Flemish writer Paul van Ostaïjen, having suffered German occupation in his native Antwerp, goes to Berlin in 1918, plunges into the politically charged milieu of the Dadaists, and writes *Bezette Stad* (1921), an explosive book of poems in "‘physioplactic’ typography" about the occupation of Antwerp, in which the jazz band appears in tandem (as it does for so many in Europe) with tango—ripened here in a polylingual setting:

Tango RRRouge

Dans mon pays engelse wijs franse tekst

quand je suis tri-
se

rue de la Glaciè_____re

ICH TANZ

so
gern

TANGO

O BUENOS AIRES

Sous le ciel de l'Argentine

enkel blijft nog staan contrapunt tot **JAZZ-BAND**

6 uur 's morgens grijze straat

FRERE JACQUES

FRERE JACQUES

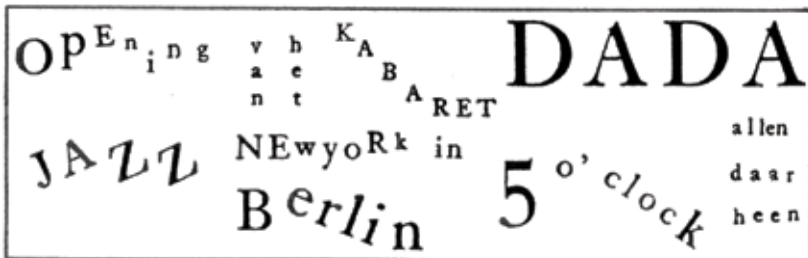
frère Jacques

Returning to his homeland in 1922, van Ostaijen sets to work on various projects, including a treatment for a film, *Bankruptcy Jazz*. The scenario conflates concurrent phenomena he experienced firsthand in Berlin: Dada, the catastrophe of currency inflation, and the arrival of jazz.

CABARET DADA IS THE FUTURE

Approval. Dadaism as real a value as an oil well. Consortium for the exploitation of Dadaism is founded.

Invitations are sent out:



The Cabaret Dada opens to the accompaniment of jazz (punctuated by pistol shots).

A new period of positivism: Jazz.

The saxophonist yells. Hellooo!!
And everybody: Heellooo. (Close-up of the mouths.)

The force of jazz spreads out from the cabaret, breaks through walls, sets clerk-typists dancing down the stairs. Students abandon a lecture on Wagner once they sense jazz is in the air. They all pour into the club. “Jazz on tables. Jazz on the stairs. / Shot of this movement in concave and convex mirrors.” An outside angle shows the windows vibrating from within. “*THE JAZZ OVERFLOWS INTO THE STREET*” with the iconic freeze frame: “magnified tube of a saxophone and body of a banjo,” an image that recurs at the end of the film. “All the jazz-steps of dancing school are gone. Supreme lyricism. Everybody jazes instinctively. Central European exertion to become Negroes.”³ What is it, what’s happening? “Revolution? Dada-jazz revolution?” Jazz everywhere. It jess grew. “Commuter trains roll in jazz tempo. / The ground trembles: shuddering and murmuring of jazz in the subway.”

Meanwhile, inflation. Much panoramic detail in closely specified montage. Finally, “JAZZ PACIFIES PEOPLE” and (more importantly?) “*DADA SAVES EUROPE*.” Sensing something of the speakeasy background of jazz (which will make Weimar Berlin its optimal transmitter), van Ostaijen envisions swarms of prostitutes descending on the docks, indulging in “harbor jazz.”

Bankruptcy Jazz resolves everything with peerless fantasy: the debt crisis is handled by converting all buildings to dance halls. Academie Française confers formal recognition on the word *jazz*; a public monument is consecrated to the “UNKNOWN JAZZ DANCER.” Finally, Charlie Chaplin becomes minister of commerce, smokes the last cigar of debt-laden public currency, and the populace responds with a paroxysm of “Total jazz,” declaiming in a bilingual declension—presaging the coming wave of Tiller Girls and the Busby Berkeley musical montage—the jazz-rendered joys of bankruptcy (*Die Pleite*, by the way, being the title of a Berlin Dada periodical):

Ich bin pleite	j’aime la banqueroute
Du bist pleite	tu aimes la banqueroute

³ Van Ostaijen’s translator, E. M. Beekman, notes the terminological complexity of this passage: “To become Negroes—in the original *vernegeren*. Pun on the verb *negeren* (*negerde*, *heft genegerd*), which means to pester, maltreat, bug someone. The Dutch noun *neger* means Negro.” “Alle danskursusjazzpassen zijn verdwenen. Le lyrisme souverain. Ieder jazzt instinct. Krachtinspanning van Centraal-Europa om te vernegeren.”

Er ist pleite	il aime la banqueroute
Wir sind pleite	aimons nous la banqueroute
Ihr seid pleite	aimez vous la banqueroute
Sie sind pleite	ils aiment la banqueroute

Saxophone (1923)

The recordings that historians will memorialize as the inauguration of authentic jazz (by King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and others) date from 1923, by which point the phenomenon of “jazz” (not to be confused with what these musicians are doing) has already achieved a global impact as formidable as any that it will subsequently have. Yet jazz is such a fledgling music at this point that its signature instrument, the saxophone, lags well behind the banjo and double bass, clarinet and trombone and trumpet. Its first master, Coleman Hawkins, is still a teenager and will not begin taking solos for several years, and his defining hit, “Body and Soul,” is far in the future. But this novelty fabrication of the nineteenth-century brass foundry is already a formidable signifier, “squeezing out the juice of dreams” in Milhaud’s imagination. In 1922 Wallace Stevens pinpoints the affront to a high-toned old Christian woman of “our bawdiness . . . indulged at last . . . / Squiggling like saxophones.” Composer Erwin Schulhoff hails it as the panacea for modern well-being:

The saxophone is ideally suited to the expression of all human and animal feelings . . . The conversation between two lovers should be led, both on the male and on the female side, with a saxophone, so that the libido would not suffer a loss of energy. Thus erotically healthy generations would be created ad infinitum; having been brought up with a saxophone, they would surely not know prudery.

The saxophone has not yet made an impact when, in 1920, Ezra Pound predicts that “the future of piano music lies in the Jazz.” In context this is a disparaging remark, since the poet views the “pye-ano” as “a sort of cheap substitute for an orchestra.” For most people, the piano remains untainted by jazz, but the same can’t be said for the saxophone. In 1924 the *New York Times* cites “that ghastly instrument, the saxophone” as an offense to musical taste; and an English dance hall in 1926 is permitted to renew its license only on the condition that bands refrain from using saxophones. T. S. Eliot, reviewing Gertrude Stein in 1927, says “her work is not improving, it is not amusing, it is

not interesting, it is not good for one's mind. But its rhythms have a peculiar hypnotic power not met with before. It has a kinship with the saxophone [*sic*]. If this is of the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians. But this is the future in which we ought not to be interested." Gradually, during the twenties, the exotic and risqué timbre of this novel reed instrument will help consolidate the soundscape of jazz, becoming in the process an internationally accessible cultural signifier, the logo for jazz as such.

Eyes tumbling into shots of absinthe
fog horn

bleating ship

a saxophone

—Vítězslav Nezval, *Antilyrik*

The fetish-woman crossed the stage
her limbs convulsed with yellow magic.
Art is the gratuitous
shiver that makes the shimmy tragic.
Obeah, obeah, wailed the saxophones.

—Malcolm Cowley, "In Memory of Florence Mills"

For the *Chicago Daily News* during 1921–22, Ben Hecht (working newshound, not yet Hollywood screenwriter)⁴ pens a series of sketches of the windy city. One of them is "Jazz Band Impressions," depicting the instruments as personae. "The trombone player has a straight part. He umpah ump with the conventional trombone fatalism. . . . Umpah ump is the soul of all things." The clarinet, more flamboyant, "raves like a fireless Ophelia. It plays the clown, the tragedian, the acrobat. A whimsical insanity lurks in the music of the clarinet. It stutters ecstasies. It postures like Tristan and whimpers like a livery-stable nag. It grimaces like Peer Gynt and winks like a lounge lizard, a cake eater." Survey-

⁴ Hecht's screen credits include *The Front Page* (1931), *Design for Living* (1933), *The Twentieth Century* (1934), *Nothing Sacred* (1937), *Gunga Din* (1939), *Angels Over Broadway* (1940), *Kiss of Death* (1947), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), *Monkey Business* (1952), and several projects for Alfred Hitchcock, including *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946). No wonder Richard Corliss emphatically declares, "Ben Hecht was the Hollywood screenwriter. Nearly every facet of that talented and haunted breed . . . can be found in Hecht's dazzlingly contradictory career."

ing the dancers, Hecht notices their fidelity split between the “umpah ump” of the rhythm section and the “tangled lyric of the clarinet”: “The music of the clarinet becomes like crazily uncoiling whips. The thoughts of the dancers shake themselves loose from words under the spur of the whips. They begin to dance, not as the feet dance. There is another rhythm here. The rhythm of little ecstasies whimpering.” Next, the cornet comes in: “And the cornet cakewalks like a hoyden vampire, the cornet whinnies like an odalisque expiring in the arms of the Wizard of Oz.” “Lust giggles at a sly jest out of the cornet. . . . It is Pan in a clown suit, Silenus on a trick mule, Eros in a Pullman smoker,” leering “like a satyr master of ceremonies” at the dancers. At last the saxophone appears—in the form of Aphrodite, “Lady of the Sea Foam”: “She gurgles a sonorous plaint out of the saxophone. The cornet sneers at her. The clarinet sneaks up on her and tweaks her nose.” Hecht insists, “This is not the Aphrodite of the Blue Danube waltz”; rather, “she is colored like a panther flower and her limbs are heavy with taboo magic. But she is still imperial.” The dancers fall into a collective trance under her influence. “The cabaret floor, jammed, seems to be moving around like a groaning turnstile.” The jazz band hammers “like a mad blacksmith” until “the pulp of figures dissolves” back into “suddenly polite and social” citizens: “Watch and see where they go. Into the brick holes, into the apartment buildings. They pack themselves away like ants in an anthill.” Ezra Pound seems to have observed the same scene in *The Cantos*, in which the “wail of the phonograph” becoming a “wail of the pornograph” provokes reflections on “the osmosis of persons”:

With a vain emptiness the virgins return to their homes
 With a vain exasperation
 The ephèbe has gone back to his dwelling,
 The djassban has hammered and hammered,
 The gentleman of fifty has reflected
 That it is perhaps just as well.
 Let things remain as they are.

The Creation of the World (1923)

The Ballet Suédois, managed by Rolf de Maré, begins a steady run at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1920, lasting through 1924, dancing to music by Debussy, Glazunov, Albeniz, and Ravel, among others. The more nota-

bly avant-garde presentations include Milhaud's *L'Homme et son désir* (1921), the collective enterprise of Le Six, *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel* (1921), Honnegger's *Skating Rink* (1922), and Satie's *Relâche* (1924) with its intermission film by René Clair, *Entr'acte*. Cole Porter's *Within the Quota* is premiered in a unique double bill with *La Création du monde* on October 25, 1923. *La Création du monde* is a thoroughly collaborative enterprise involving poet Blaise Cendrars, artist Fernand Léger, composer Darius Milhaud, and choreographer Jean Börlin. Börlin has previously arranged a solo dance for himself called *Sculpture nègre*. Léger has designed and illustrated two books by Cendrars, *J'ai tué* (1918) and *La fin du monde filmée par l'Ange N-D* (1919), and they've worked together on Abel Gance's film *La Roue*. Cendrars' *Anthologie nègre* (1921) provides a textual basis for the ballet, and Léger undertakes extensive research in ethnographic sources, including Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) and Marius de Zayus' *African Negro Art and Its Influence on Modern Art* (1916), as well as the Musée d'Ethnographie and the private collections of Paul Guillaume and Alphonse Kann. Léger wants inflatable skins for the décor, but pumping gas into them is too distracting. In the end he devises a set with mobile parts and continuous



fluctuation of lighting. The visual integration of costumes and sets makes the bodies appear to be detachable parts of the environment, suddenly animated by Milhaud's music. As for Milhaud, he is asked to participate shortly after

returning from a trip to New York, where he has gorged himself on the new music up in Harlem. But his musical *negritude* goes back to 1916 when, serving as Paul Claudel's secretary at the French Legation in Rio de Janeiro, he was exposed to Afro-Brazilian idioms by composer Heitor Villa-Lobos.⁵

In Cendrars' view, "*Le jazz hot* is not an art but a new way of living." His *Creation* is inaugural. Composer Bohuslav Martinů, arriving in Paris from Prague in 1923, finds that "the discovery of jazz in the postwar era has been one of the criteria determining the aspirations of the present time." "The Jazz Band is the orgiastic dance orchestra," writes Paul Bernhard. "It is the instrumental and rhythmic expression of primal instincts given naked and manifestly primitive agitation." The hero of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* submits to a Nietzschean self-overcoming in order to learn the fox trot. Primitivism in dance—and, by association, jazz—becomes Europe's way of purging itself of overcivilized neuroses and hyper-sophistication. The irony, of course, is that cultivated primitivism adds another layer of sophistication, epitomized by such artful productions as *The Creation of the World*. But Milhaud resists orgiastic release, so his score retains enough of the dirge to bear some trace of the blues.

Coda: many years later, Léger will find himself in a museum in Chicago, his allegiances validated from the source, it seems to him: "I found myself faced by six very elegant blacks, musicians in a New York band. They began to dance in front of my pictures and wanted to buy one to use as a backdrop for their jazz band."

Experiment in Modern Music (1924)

On February 12, 1924, bulbous bandleader Paul Whiteman presents "An Experiment in Modern Music" at Aeolian Hall in New York, seeking to vindicate his

⁵ The precedent of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* looms over the occasion to such an extent that some reviewers disparage *The Creation of the World* as derivative. Glenn Watkins refers to the way "*Le Sacre's* attendant myths had multiplied and had found a distended base of sponsorship" and then summons up the complex tributaries informing *Creation* (including, among them, a reference to Brancusi): "For musical Primitivism, originally defined in terms of a Russian folk culture rooted in prehistoric times, had now forged an alliance with the themes of a Romanian sculptor and a *musique nègre* imported from the Americas, both North and South, in the company of a scenario, set, and score by a trio of French artists in response to a commission by a Swedish ballet company." Not precisely a trio: Cendrars was Swiss.

conviction that the rough edges of the music can be smoothed out to establish jazz in the concert hall. Luckily, Whiteman has commissioned a work from Tin Pan Alley veteran George Gershwin, so the “Experiment” succeeds with the public and the critics mainly on the strength of *Rhapsody in Blue*, vaulting its composer into national prominence and lending credibility to Whiteman’s legislative claim to be the King of Jazz. Jazz historians will invariably choose the Duke and the Count over the King as bona fide jazz royalty, but Whiteman’s role, like that of white men in general, is pivotal in the intersection of jazz with modernism. While debate about jazz has been rampant in the press from the moment the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded its million-seller barnyard anthem *Livery Stable Blues* in 1917, Whiteman’s “Experiment” changes the nature of the discourse,⁶ first by soliciting highbrow response, second by placing jazz in a more general debate about *modern* music—a debate more modestly incited by Eva Gauthier in 1923, when she put together an eclectic recital of song, mixing compositions by Schoenberg, Bartók, and Hindemith with popular tunes by Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and George Gershwin, who accompanied her on piano for these numbers.

In the early years of jazz, the sweet/hot dichotomy encompasses other terms with more conspicuous values attached: restraint versus abandon, civilized versus primitive, sophisticated versus untutored. White and black dance band leaders alike are concerned with the tawdry image conjured by the jazz label, and work hard to counter it with all the accoutrements of professionalism, from band tuxedos to a polished ensemble sound, along with a repertoire of waltzes and “sweet” numbers. For bandleaders aspiring to loftier venues, the issue of class is more to the point than race. The public demeanor of the predominantly “cool” dance band capable of a few judiciously timed “hot” breaks reflects the mores of middle-class permissiveness that have an appointed (and strictly delimited) place for sowing wild oats. This middle American dominance of the musical marketplace will become even more apparent in the thirties when jazz gives way to “swing,” a term unencumbered by the taint of bordellos and gin mills.

⁶ Whiteman’s concert is not unique. Later in the year, on November 23, Vincent Lopez mounts a similar concatenation at the Metropolitan Opera House, mixing W. C. Handy’s “symphonietta in ‘jazz style’” with Rimsky-Korsakov, Irving Berlin, and novelty items including a harmonica rendition of Saint-Saëns.

Tin Pan Alley (1924)

After dispiriting road tryouts in 1924, the curtain finally rises (in 1925) to a flock of winsome chorus girls singing “Flappers are we”: *No! No! Nanette!* is off and running, launching the lucrative career of its young composer, Vincent Youmans, with indelible tunes like “Tea for Two” and “I Want To Be Happy.” Born in 1898, Youmans’ profile assumes a generational pattern: instead of continuing in the parental garment trade or pursuing a more elevated career path, he opts for tune plugging in Tin Pan Alley, like fellow Jews Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Arthur Schwartz, Harold Arlen, Dorothy Fields, and E. Y. Harburg. For the legion of immigrant Jews, being an outsider is a given, and in the cultural pluralism of the postwar years, opportunities entice from new industries, notably the Hollywood film studios. But a significant if less well-known role is played by Jews finally breaking into the closed world of Yankee publishing. Alfred A. Knopf, Horace Liveright, and the Boni brothers preside over firms producing the lion’s share of literary modernism as well as the Harlem Renaissance. Wanting a journal as an extension of his publishing house, Knopf engages H. L. Mencken to produce *American Mercury*, in which certain Chicago jazzmen find their musical tastes mirrored in prose. “That *Mercury* really got to be the Austin High Gang’s Bible,” recalls Mezz Mezzrow. “It looked to us like Mencken was yelling the same message in his magazine that we were trying to get across in our music; his words were practically lyrics to our hot jazz.”

Jes Grew (1924)

The Book Nook is a congenial house near the entry arch to the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, favorite hangout of Hoagy Carmichael’s gang. Hoagy meets soldiers “who had been to Europe, and they talked of jazz now, right out in the open, not ashamed of it. They told me about the tremendous popularity of jazz in Europe during the war and what it was doing over there.” Carmichael and pal Bix Beiderbecke, soon to be a jazz icon, excitedly absorb recordings of Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky. Carmichael tickles the ivories while his chum William Moenkhaus, who studied in Switzerland during the war, tells him about the Dada pranks, exhibits, and cabaret in Zurich. Carmichael’s Collegians and Bix Beiderbecke’s Wolverines are regulars at university

and town functions. “To watch [Carmichael], pale and intense in a yellow slicker, bobbing and jerking like a marionette at the keyboard, was to behold a man possessed by a purity of expression wholly consonant with the ‘manifesto’ of Cabaret Voltaire days. It takes no great leap of imagination to see him as a Hugo Ball figure in Moenkhaus’s mind, pounding away as the high-spirited jaspery of this midwestern ‘playground for crazy emotions’ guggled and plashed around him.” The gaunt Carmichael even resembles Hugo Ball—who never quite recovers from ravaging bouts of homelessness and malnourishment early in the war when he moved to Zurich with Emmy Hemmings, where he eventually found work as a music hall pianist (he will die at forty in 1927). Maybe Carmichael intuits the kinship through the New Orleans Rhythm Kings’ hit “That Dada Strain,” recorded by Mamie Smith and her Jazz Hounds in 1922, then covered by half a dozen others in the next few months. Putting together a Dada retrospective for the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1953, Marcel Duchamp will make sure to include a copy of the original 78 rpm in a display window alongside artifacts like his own fugitive magazine, *The Blind Man*.

In Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, a novelistic docudrama of Twenties Harlem, “That Dada Strain” is the specific agent of intercontinental jazz: “UPON HEARING ETHEL WATERS SING ‘THAT DA-DA-STRAIN’ AND A JAZZ BAND PLAY ‘PAPA DE-DA-DA’ EUROPEAN PAINTERS TAKE JES GREW ABROAD.” “For if the Jazz Age is year for year the Essences and Symptoms of the times, then Jes Grew is the germ making it rise yeast-like across the American plain.” If jazz is a symptom, what’s the disease? Choosing between them marks a generational divide defined by war as historical threshold. Born in 1896, F. Scott Fitzgerald is not so much prescient as in step with his generation by naming his books *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920) and *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922). His literary generation includes John Dos Passos (born 1896), Hart Crane and Ernest Hemingway (both 1899), Thomas Wolfe (1900), Langston Hughes and John Steinbeck (1902); while in the music world there are Sidney Bechet and Fletcher Henderson (1897), George Gershwin and Paul Robeson (1898), Duke Ellington and Hoagy Carmichael (1899), Louis Armstrong, Aaron Copland, George Antheil, and Kurt Weill (1900), Earl Hines and Bix Beiderbecke (1903), Fats Waller and Coleman Hawkins (1904). Except for Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver, born like Ezra Pound in 1885, this is the generation that makes the twenties musically roar.

Language Ragtime (1924)

Marinetti singles out Nicolas Beauduin as the exemplar of jazz literature as such in his 1924 survey of futurism around the world: “singer of jazz-band paroxysm and the international Grand Express.” In 1922 Jacques Povolozky, owner of La Cible, had published Beauduin’s *L’Homme cosmogonique*, a Whitmanian epic excerpts of which had appeared in most of the leading journals of the European avant-garde. Beauduin makes the obligatory reference to “Le JAZZ-BAND”—with a parenthetical note: “*frénétique*”—howling its electric fever into the music hall atmosphere, charged with alcoholic delirium (a constant link throughout this period):

Le JAZZ-BAND hurle (*frénétique*)
 Dans l’air se répand une fièvre électrique
 si forte que soudainement les Music-halls
 semblent, chargés de délire et d’alcool,
 des fournaies de joie terrible qui exposent
 dans le soir fou troué par leur apothéose.⁷

The scene is becoming a trope of modernistic verse. Italian futurist Fillia, in “Mechanical Sensuality,” evokes the “polydimensional . . . tactile visual olfactory supersenses” of a bar, including jazz ensemble:

	ta ta km barambarà
	ta ta km barambarà
sssssss (Jazz-Band)	barambarà
AAAAAHH !	la pum barambarà
	LA PUM BARAMBARA

⁷ In a period translation:

The JAZZ-BAND screams *fre-n-zieeed*
 Electric effluvia in the air
 so strong that the Music Halls

	<i>flame</i>	
seem suddenly	<i>fever</i>	
	<i>alcohol</i>	
furnaces of a terrible explosive joy		
High evening, bored by the apotheosis		

Having discovered in jazz “the atavistic modernity they extolled,” Berlin Dadaists like Walter Mehring call for an “international lingual work of art, the language-ragtime.” Langston Hughes agrees: “Play it, jazz band! / You’ve got seven languages to speak in / And then some.” The musical refinement of scat singing Louis Armstrong achieved in the twenties bears a striking resemblance



to Dadaist sound poems. Dadaists make a point of brandishing the term *jazz* as a typographic feature in their placards. Christian Schad and Walter Serner designed an ad for a 1920 Dada ball in Geneva deploying a single capital A to emphasize the vowel shared by the three words

Jazz, Band, and Dada. Dragan Aleksić issues two journals from Belgrade in 1922, *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz*, with advertising support from local bars where jazz is played. A Merz matinee in Berlin in 1923, featuring Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann, makes reference to “Wang Wang Blues.” In 1924 Dutch printer and designer H. N. Werkman, linked with international Dada through his magazine *The Next Call*, begins using the generic title “Hot Printing” for some of his publications.



For Europeans, jazz evokes distant places, often as unexpected as a cymbal crash, like Galveston in Philippe Soupault’s “Ragtime” or Honolulu in Karel Schulz’s “Jazz Over the Sea.” Walter Mehring captures the free associational frenzy in “Jazz-Band,” in which the instruments somehow agitate herds of

buffalo and kangaroos “von New Orleans bis Westend,” and an anachronistic refrain in English keeps breaking in:

I want to be
 I want to be
 I want to be down home in Dixie
 and cowboy rings
 bei scharfen drinks!

Contemporaneous with the founding of the Bauhaus, an avant-garde collective in Prague publishes *The Revolutionary Anthology of Devětsil* (1922), with articles on various aspects of modern life. Charlie Chaplin (Charlot) becomes the mascot of modernity throughout Europe, his acrobatic movements rendered accessible to the populace at large by way of dance—and dance is invariably an extension of jazz. For the Devětsil group, jazz is not strictly a musical phenomenon but a symbol of enthralling pursuits from over the ocean.⁸ In “The Joys of the Electric Century,” Artus Černík evokes

the bar, the place of modern dances: the shimmy, the one-step, the two-step, the boston, the fox-trot—of modern music, **the jazz band**—of the half-waltz, the half-ballad, the polka. These dances are not bad dances, after all. They are acrobatics, madness of youth, a wealth of moves, harmony. Hatred of them is absurd, and time will disarm their enemies. The cossack, the csardás, the trasák, the mazurka, the savoy—all are merely dance forms of the past. The time of futurism and music-halls is perkier, and we have a reason to rejoice over dances that make the blood circulate, that require presence of mind, physical ability, and confidence. . . . And the jazz-band! Listen to it just once—no, better yet, several times—so that you can locate its flavor. In it, there is the screaming of automobile horns, electric bells, and sirens—there are rough low notes which offend the overly refined ear, there is thunder with colorful flashes, gunshots, a ruckus encapsulated in some beautiful song of battle or triumph.

⁸ “The affinity with the other arts, with dance, poetry and film, is one of the reasons for the enthusiastic reception of jazz and its stylistic impact on the compositions of Bohuslav Martinů, J. Ježek, E. Schulhoff and Emil Burian, author of one of the first studies of jazz in Europe. Jazz was perceived not just as the musical realization of the rhythm of modernity, but also as a symbol of popular entertainments from across the ocean. Jazz responded to the aesthetic ‘of the streets’ as advocated by the members of Devětsil, incorporating their aspirations for an activity both playful and optimistic.”

In virtually the same terms Černík uses, T. S. Eliot describes Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* as "transform[ing] the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life; . . . transform[ing] these despairing noises into music."

Eliot calls it despair; to others it seems delirious; Gertrude Stein recognizes in jazz an anxiety comparable to that felt in the theater in the gap between the performance and the spectator's own physiological restlessness. "The jazz bands made of this thing, the thing that makes you nervous at the theatre, they made of this thing an end in itself. They made of this different tempo a something that was nothing but a difference in tempo between anybody and everybody." Jazz is like waiting for everything all at once. Every movement has its manifesto in the heyday of the avant-garde, but there's no manifesto for jazz—unless Stein's "Portraits and Repetition" counts. "As I say what one repeats is the scene in which one is acting, the days in which one is living, the coming and going which one is doing, anything one is remembering is a repetition, but existing as a human being, that is being listening and hearing is never repetition. It is not repetition if it is that which you are actually doing because naturally each time the emphasis is different just as the cinema has each time a slightly different thing to make it all be moving" (179). When Stein specifies the value of "keeping two times going at once" and enthuses over the bifocal act of talking and listening simultaneously, she wonders "is there any way of making what I know come out as I know it, come out not as remembering. I found this very exciting," she adds. And so do multitudes, except they call it jazz.

The Jazz Poet (1925)

"The new poetry of the English language has proceeded out of America," Mina Loy informs readers of *Charm* in 1925. "Of things American it attains the aristocratic situation of vitality. This unexpectedly realized evaluation of American jazz and American poetry is endorsed by two publics; the one universal, the other infinitesimal in comparison." The "unknown audience," about which novelist Wilkie Collins ruminated in the Victorian noon, emerges with ubiquitous force in jazz, as motor of the recording industry and the preponderant music of cultural modernity *entre deux guerres*. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, in their *Survey of Contemporary Poetry* (1927), wonder why "the plain

reader prefers bad contemporary poetry,” then concede that it “can give him as much innocent enjoyment as a good short story or his newspaper or an up-to-date jazz orchestra.” The next year, in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, Riding warily revisits the thrall of popular verse: “I am . . . distressed by the musification of poetry because poetry is perhaps the only human pursuit left still capable of developing anti-socially. . . . [W]e get a sort of jazz poetry, politically musical, that reveals a desire in the poet for a primitive tribal sense and for poetry as an art emotionally coordinating group sympathies.”

Although *The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes (1926) is the first book by a poet really conversant with jazz, references to jazz start cropping up in American poetry as early as Carl Sandburg’s “Jazz Fantasia” in the *Dial* (March 1920: “Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos, / sob on the long cool winding saxophones. / Go to it, O jazzmen.” *The Light Guitar* by Arthur Guiterman (1923), “The Jazz Cannibal” by Percy Haselden in *Punch* (1924, reprinted the next year in *Literary Digest*), “Jazzband” by Eugene Jolas in *Cinema* (1926), *Bringing Jazz!* (1930) by Maxwell Bodenheim, and *Jasbo Brown and Selected Poems* by Heywood DuBose (1931) fill out the convoy. T. S. Eliot will struggle unsuccessfully to complete his jazz-inflected music hall psychodrama *Sweeney Agonistes* (with its adaptation of the 1902 pop song “Under the Bamboo Tree,” penned by James Weldon Johnson, his brother J. Rosamund, and Bob Cole), while e. e. cummings pecks away at “the dribbling moan of jazz” and “the tousle of saxophonic brogue” in his poems. Young surrealist acolyte Charles Henri Ford starts up a new poetry magazine called *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms* in 1929. With her inimitable precision, Mina Loy captures the aura of the moment in “The Widow’s Jazz,” documenting a milieu in which “shampooed gigolos / prowl to the sobbing taboos” with their “lethargic ecstasy of steps / backing into primeval goal.” As for the music, “pruned contours / dissolve / in the brazen shallows of dissonance,” and “The black brute-angels / in their human gloves / bellow through a monstrous growth of metal trunks // and impish musics / crumble the ecstatic loaf.”⁹

But in this decade most indelibly associated with jazz, there’s only one jazz poet in the public mind, profiled by Clement Wood in a chapter of his

⁹ “The Widow’s Jazz” poignantly juxtaposes the sounds of jazz presently heard (or overheard, it’s not clear in the poem) with Loy’s lost husband, Arthur Cravan, presumed dead, but whose disappearance in the South American tropics is distilled into an associative blur with “this cajoling jazz / [which] blows with its tropic breath / among the echoes of the flesh / a synthesis / of racial caress.”

1925 survey *Contemporary Poetry of America*: “Vachel Lindsay: Jazz and the Poet.” It’s a role that embitters this champion declaimer of verse, for he deplors everything jazz signifies. In 1926 he’ll even publish “A Curse for the Saxophone,” culminating in this vision of Lincoln’s assassin in the afterlife:

“John Wilkes Booth, you are welcome to Hell,
 And they played it on the saxophone, and played it well.
 And he picked up a saxophone, grunting and rasping,
 The red-hot horn in his hot hands clasping,
 And he played a typical radio jazz,
 He started an earthquake, he knew what for,
 And at last he started the late World War.
 Our nerves all razzed, and our thoughts all jazzed,
 Booth and his saxophone started the war!”

The flamboyant anachronism, coupled with the fantasy of jazz setting America on the warpath, is not quite poetic whimsy like Lindsay’s 1918 poem depicting the kaiser being vanquished by “the Jazz-bird.” By the time *Going-to-the-Stars* appears in 1926, America’s wandering troubadour has unwittingly become its “jazz poet.” His affinity for black oratory, most famously in “Congo,” had long been evident.¹⁰ It’s not the racial affiliation but the jazz label that irks him. The poem “The Daniel Jazz”¹¹ has been his downfall, chosen without Lindsay’s approval by his English publisher as the title of a collection. Arriving in London in October 1920 he finds himself expected to play the role of jazz poet and even depicted in the press “turning handsprings, and described as whistling and snapping my fingers while I recited.” Two years later he’s still festering, writing to Harriet Monroe: “I have very much resented being called a ‘Jazz’ poet, especially by the British Papers, because it was used to mean something synonymous with hysteria, shrieking and fidgets. I abhor the kind of Ball-Room dancing that goes with Jazz, and I abhor the blasphemy that Jazz has

¹⁰ Lindsay’s ability to dissociate “jazz” from African Americans is poignantly evident in his encounter with Langston Hughes in a hotel where Hughes works as a waiter. At a public dinner, Hughes slips copies of several poems to Lindsay (“The Weary Blues,” “Jazzonia,” and “Negro Dancers,” the opening poems of *The Weary Blues*), who reads them to the audience during his own recital. The accompanying publicity (including Carl Van Vechten’s prompt report in *Vanity Fair*) proves decisive for Hughes’ career. If anyone deserved the epithet “jazz poet” it was Hughes, but this episode makes clear how inexorably the jazz label would adhere to whites, in literature as in music, for in the culture at large, black people were rarely accorded the respect of being discussed as individuals. For Lindsay, of course, the label was disrespectful because it implied he was not a bard but an entertainer.

made of the beautiful slow whispered Negro Spirituals.” Lindsay would prefer being known as “The College Yell” poet,” because jazz “has the leer of the badlands in it . . . It is full of the dust of the dirty dance. The Saxophone, its chief instrument is the most diseased instrument in all modern music. It absolutely smells of the hospital.” Incensed by ulterior expectations imposed on him by the jazz epithet, he nevertheless sullenly accepts \$250 in 1930 to compose a poem on “The Jazz Age,” its repeated refrain “Good-bye, Jazz Age. I’m going Home” ominously foreshadowing his suicide the next year.

Bauhaus (1925)

In 1925 Bauhaus theater director Oskar Schlemmer describes a scene convulsively dedicated to “the latest, the most modern, up-to-the-minute, Dadaism, circus, *variété*, jazz, hectic pace, movies, America, airplanes, the automobile. Those are the terms in which people here think.” Given the Bauhaus’s self-appointed role in synthesizing modern art and design, students and faculty are keenly attuned to the cutting edge, even socially. “Nightlife at the Bauhaus claims the same importance as daytime activities,” one student reports. “One must know how to dance.” “Of course the credit goes to Arnold Weininger,” he adds. “He organized the Bauhaus band. Jazz band, accordion, xylophone, saxophone, bombast, revolver.” Five years later jazz still prevails, and “people are either reserved, straightforward, and cerebral, or they are simply sexual in an unsublimated way. People either pray according to German industrial standards or listen to phonograph records of American jazz hits twanging about sentimental voluptuousness.” Shortly before joining the Bauhaus staff, László Moholy-Nagy drafts “Dynamics of a Metropolis: A Film Sketch” (1921–22). All the urban paraphernalia of modernity are here, including a traffic jam, factory work, a football match, pole vaulting, dance, and two scenarios straining at the limits of silent film: radio antennae on rooftops and “Jazz-band, *with its sound*.”

¹¹ “The Daniel Jazz” perpetuates Lindsay’s reputation in another medium in 1925, in the form of a solo cantata by Louis Gruenberg, who sets several other poems by Lindsay to music as well. Having conducted the American première of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* in 1923, Gruenberg earns his modernist credentials primarily through links to jazz, from his Violin Sonata of 1918 to *The Creation* (1924, based on James Weldon Johnson’s poem); his opera *The Emperor Jones* (1933), based on O’Neill’s play; and numerous piano works, including *Jazzberries* (1925), *Jazzettes* (1926), and *Jazz Masks and Jazz Epigrams* (1929).

The Bauhaus serves throughout the twenties as interface between Eastern and Western European avant-gardes, during a period when references

REGIM LACTAT MANIVELA IN TIMPAN
 BULEVARD CITEȘTE ORIENT EXPRES ANTRACIT AUTOBUZ EMBRION
 MIRAJ CLORHIDRIC IMPOSIBIL REALIZAT CE OCHI MĂRUNȚI
 CA ZAHĂR PISAT INCEST CORTEGIU
 ABSTRACT AGENȚIE DE SCHIMB TRANSATLANTIC VEȘTILE SE
 CIOCnesc CA LA BILLIARD AVOIANE

PARIS
 T S F
 LONDRA
 NEW-YORK
 BERLIN

COBOARĂ CA BAROMETRE ARDE COLIERUL DE FARURI EUROPA
 ARE CRAMPE INGHITE STĂLPIL COMUNALI INUTIL CĂT POȚI CONFORTABIL
 INFINITUL IN PANTOFI DE CASĂ ANUNȚĂ
 BISEXUALITATE ATLET URMĂREȘTE DISCURSUL RECIPROC GAZETELE SE DESCHID
 CA FERESTRE INCEPE CONCERTUL SECOLULUI
 ASCENSOR SUNĂ INTERBANCAR JAZZ SALTINBANC CLAXON

FABEMOL
 RE
 FABEMOL
 IN
 PIJAMA
 FOOTBALL

ILARIE VORONCA

to jazz abound in vanguard manifestos, albeit often perfunctory, like a Day-Glo swirl on a hippie poster: “America lock skyscrapers wide-mind SELF-SHIP . . . Jazz band Zenithist music. Thirty-six soda-bottles—Bruit,” Ljubomir Micić obscurely proclaims in “Shimmy at the Latin Quarter Graveyard.” In Barcelona, Salvador Dalí and two associates publish “Yellow Manifesto (Catalan Antiartistic Manifesto)” declaring the purgative virtues of sports, cinema,

rapid transit, modern inventions like the phonograph, and of course “the popular music of today: jazz and today’s dances.” In place of a manifesto, the Rumanian journal *75HP* (75 horsepower) issues an “Aviogram” in bold red and black:

LIKE WINDOWS THE CONCERT OF THE CENTURY BEGINS
 ELEVATORS RINGS INTER-BANK CLOWN-LIKE JAZZ
 HORN
 F FLAT
 D
 F FLAT
 IN
 PAJAMAS
 FOOTBALL

75HP editor Ilarie Voronca envisions words “run[ning] through the faubourg wrapping themselves in the jazz of vertiginous sentences,” anticipating Jack Kerouac’s zest for “bop prosody.”

Skimming lightly over a parade of associations, jazz seeks out the primal layers of consciousness long buried under European cultural amnesia, blending primitivist regeneration with futurist longing. Under the sign of jazz, the paradox of an urban jungle emerges, soliciting a transfiguration of “psychophysiology” as in the manifesto of integralism (1925): “We definitely live under the sign of the urban. *Filter-intelligence, surprise-lucidity. Rhythm-speed.* Simultaneous balls—atmospheres giving concerts—billions of saxophones, telegraph nerves from the equator to the poles—strikes of lightning . . . New psycho-physiologies are growing.” Drawing on the polymathic anarchism of Dada and the utopian program of constructivism, integralism, as its name suggests, wants to integrate art forms with lifestyles: “Poetry, music, architecture, painting, dance, all step forward integrally linked towards a definitive and lofty scale.” Jazz is equally alluring to integralism in Budapest and poetism in Prague: “*Poetry for HEARING: the music of loud noises, jazz, radiogenics.*” Four months before the publication of the journal *Integral*, the allied Rumanian journal *Contimpuranul* mounts an art exhibit. At its opening, a scholar’s lecture on the African influence on modern art is (by design) “suddenly sundered by a drum roll”:

The lights that then erupted revealed on the podium, behind the master of ceremonies, a jazz-band, replete with Negro musician. The sound of strings, sirens and drums. The perplexed multitude attempted without much success to advance at the podium. Did the directors of the exhibition pre-plan perhaps this general first impression, this bewildering amalgam of tones like a gigantic collection of colored butterflies? Because at least as far as the intervention of the jazz band is concerned it is certain that we were not only dealing with an effect of stage direction but with a veritable modernist ritual, of Dadaist manifestation.

Responding to the exhibition, a reviewer concludes: “In fact, everything can be contained in a single word: musicalization!” And yet, as E. F. Burian (Prague musician and theater director) recognizes, “jazz is more than just a style of music. It is about living in the present and relishing it. It is about dancing, reading pulp fiction, and going to the movies. It is a lifestyle.” The lifestyle visibly beckons in a 1930 advertisement in the Czech review *ReD*, in which a photo-montage most prominently features the Bauhaus jazz band opposite a boldface appeal in German: “Junge menschen aller länder, kommt ans bauhaus!”

Capricious Geometry (1925)

At the threshold of lifestyle modernism, jazz becomes a crucial ingredient in an ensemble that encompasses skyscrapers and chewing gum, comic strips, sports cars, Gillette razors, short haircuts and short skirts, TSF, cubism, and “sex-appeal.” TSF is the universalized French abbreviation for radio transmission (*telegraphie sans fils*), and these enigmatic capital letters commonly perch at the margins of poems, collages, and paintings throughout the twenties like chattering aviograms—even figuring in the title of Jaroslav Seifert’s 1925 collection of poems, *Na vlnách TSF* (On the Waves of TSF). Mexican poet Manuel Maples Arce’s poem “T. S. F.” appears in the Belgian journal *Manomètre*, celebrating the contraction of space achieved by radio waves: “Heart / attentive to the distance, it’s / a New York / jazz band.”¹² It runs like an optical refrain through Jaime Miravittles’ poem “La Foire de Paris—“T.S.F. T.S.F. T.S.F.”—culminating in a pyramidal exultation:

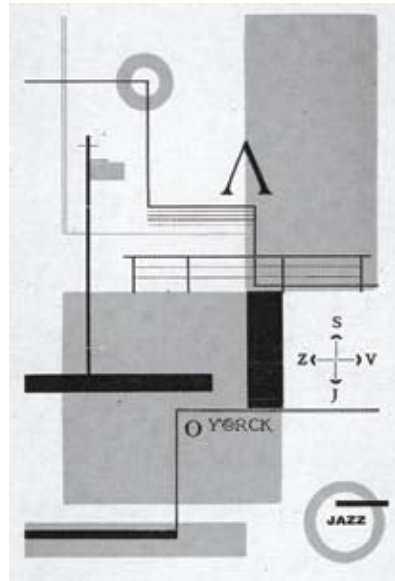
T. S. F.
 T. S. F.
 T. S. F.
 T. S. F.
 ; M à g i c a !

The tick of messages extracted from radio waves constitutes the “true gigantic poetry” of modern life: “poets you are superfluous!” exclaims Bruno Jasienski in a poem. As for the *look* of this new world pulsing from beacons like the Eiffel Tower, it is decidedly cubist. Having preceded the war as an insurgency in art, cubism now serves as a general principle of applied social locomotion for a spawning modernity.

The editor of the immense *Encyclopédie des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes au XXème Siècle* (an accompaniment to the major Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925) evokes a milieu in which, “tired of curves, having used up the joys of a timid naturalism and stylized

¹²Manuel Maples Arce was the founder of the Mexican vanguard group Estridentismo, and his poem “T. S. F.” (TSH in Spanish) was written for the inaugural radio broadcast in Mexico City on May 8, 1923, on a station associated with the literary journal *El Universal Ilustrado*. The editor boldly declared that “Estridentismo and radiophony are twin figures; they are both avant-garde creations!”

flora and fauna which their predecessors had abused, the designers of 1925 have developed a capricious geometry.” This “capricious geometry”—almost but not quite what Salvador Dalí will dub “the rubber sound”—resonates agreeably with the jazz that accompanies it in the public imagination, inasmuch as jazz (in addition to its “jungle” rhythms) is thought to embody the dynamism of a machine aesthetic. Robert Goffin’s initial response to jazz in 1920 is to write poetry, with visual cubist accompaniment: “Possessed immediately by a sort of frenzied lyricism, I wrote *Jazz Band*, a collection of poems in praise of the new music [to which a] great cubist artist contributed four woodcuts, to illustrate it.” Karel Teige characterizes “wild jazz” as “a little Cubist monster.” The “Cubist dance par excellence,” the Charleston, is prominently featured in the 1926 film *Emak Bakia* by Man Ray; and the press generally refers to any angularity in design, any geometrical abstraction, as “cubist.” In the dissemination of cubist-inspired geometries, Sonia Delaunay is a pioneer in fabric, clothing, and décor (while her son Charles Delaunay becomes the doyen of hot jazz discography). “Clothing is not made for standing still,” so “fashion immediately took to Cubist theory and form that engaged



movement. . . . As ready as Futurism was to spring into action, Cubism was a perpetual motion machine, moving with every facet. For fashion, the energy was only exacerbated.” Jazz, the sonic soul mate of perpetual motion machines, supplements the already “exacerbated” energy of cubist fashion. In its wake, Prague poet and Devětsil member Vítězslav Nezval writes, in the foreword to the score of Bohuslav Martinů’s ballet *Who Is the Most Powerful in the World* (1922), “We are going to study the possibility of new ballet on the street, in the ring and the dance hall, everywhere movement is naturally manifested. We are going to look for immediate expressions of it at football and boxing matches.”

Ballet *Mécanique* (1925)

For aspiring composers, as for artists, Paris is often a first choice for study, especially for those in the twenties alert to its *mélange* of neoclassicism and jazz. Uuno Klami arrives from Finland to study with Ravel and promptly composes *Une Nuit à Montmartre*, the name he gives to his jazz-inflected first piano concerto (1925). Aaron Copland, native of Brooklyn, somehow remains ignorant of jazz until he goes to Paris in 1922 to study with Nadia Boulanger and begins fitfully assimilating the fertile residue of his homeland while composing a ballet, *Grohg*, on a vampire theme. When a friend gets wind of Copland's dalliance with jazz, he exclaims, "But that's *whorehouse* music!" In an American context suffused with Puritan alarm and the Protestant work ethic, the Storyville origin of jazz—not to mention its gangster patronage in the bootleg era—is inconveniently near at hand. It's one thing to acknowledge the thespian skills of a Paul Robeson or the musical integrity of the sorrow songs, but for a white man to drag the gutter into the concert hall is another thing altogether. In November 1925, Aaron Copland's *Music for Theatre* premieres, and his career is launched with a patently jazz-based composition—evidence, for musical watchdog Daniel Gregory Mason¹³ (shared with Henry Ford) of a Jewish conspiracy to "Negrotize" American culture. But for others, Copland is just what the world of serious music has been waiting for: an unimpeachably modernized native son for whom jazz is an available idiom—indigenous, a tributary of folk music, along with rodeo hollers and barn dances.

The jazz elements will persist as ironic signals of world weariness (as if Prufrock were subject to orchestration) in Copland's *Piano Concerto*, premiering in January 1927, even if the more enduring feature of the piece comes in the finale, when Copland summons up the orchestral stomp Leonard Bernstein will later use to animate street gang ballet in *West Side Story*. After a brief

¹³ Mason, the starched collar of Yankee establishment insularity, wages a lifelong battle against declining musical tastes, for which he blames both jazz and modernism are to blame. "Stravinsky as Symptom," published in the April 1925 issue of *American Mercury*, epitomizes his resentment. Jazz, "the doggerel of music," is merely "a monotonous repetition of short stereotyped figures. For this reason it is popular with listless, easily distracted people." Mason recognizes these short stereotyped figures from elsewhere: namely, "the so-called ultra-modernist composers, headed by Stravinsky." Many in the American music establishment share Mason's concern that classical composers might abandon traditional craft in an opportunistic bid for immediate popularity, even as they are distressed by the influential if *unpopular* new musical fashions emanating from Vienna, Berlin, Paris.

dalliance with dissonance, Copland goes on to forge the idiomatic populism of *Appalachian Spring*, and his jazz modernism recedes. The more explosive intersection of modernism and jazz in 1925 is being undertaken in Paris by expatriate George Antheil—one of Ezra Pound's many "discoveries"—with his *Ballet mécanique* and *Jazz Symphony*. Antheil is lionized in Paris for being the "bad boy of music" (as he will title his autobiography). Originally called *Message to Mars*, *Ballet mécanique* is the title the composer settles on because it sounds "brutal, contemporary, hard-boiled, symbolic of the spiritual exhaustion, the superathletic, non-sentimental period commencing 'The Long Armistice.'" When the work crosses the Atlantic (along with his *Jazz Symphony*) to Carnegie Hall in 1927, the *enfant terrible* will be maligned as merely terrible. Antheil blames the indignity on a huge and "rather tasteless" stage curtain, "representing a 1927 jazz-mad America." The fiasco is evocatively rendered in Paul Rosenfeld's gratified obituary in the *Dial*: "Round us, the Jazz Age writhes in pain and dies away among belated worshippers; and with it fly perverse idealism and counterfeit energy."

Vanity Fair (1925)

Whiteman's "Experiment in Modern Music" had been a genuine experiment, in a sense most pertinent to the clientele for *Vanity Fair*, which by 1925 is solidly launched on integrating jazz phenomena into the awareness of the sleek set, routinely covering black America as cultural chic. Carl Van Vechten, self-appointed impresario of Harlem for downtown sophisticates, periodically reports on black music, profiling Gershwin as "An American Composer Who Is Writing Notable Music in the Jazz Idiom" and introducing Langston Hughes to the public along with four of his poems. Virgil Thomson, presumably on the strength of his musical analysis of jazz for *American Mercury*, now becomes a frequent contributor to *Vanity Fair*, beginning with "How Modern Music Gets That Way." Mocking musical establishment pompousness in the May 1925 issue, Thomson recommends jazzing the classics in the spirit of Dada. But by June he's lamenting "The Cult of Jazz" as "just another form of highbrowism, like the worship of discord or the worship of Brahms." Jazz is certainly becoming fashionable: in the *New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town" it's noted that, with classical virtuosi Heifetz, Paderewski, and Godowsky among its fans, jazz can no longer be considered a parvenu. Although Thomson is skeptical of jazz as fashion, he respects its roots, wisely predicting that "probably the best negro music

will always come from the negroes themselves." As for the immediate concert season, he attributes Whiteman's ascendancy to a "cult of Victorianism." In less than six months, then, Thomson has gone from being an advocate of jazzing the classics to lamenting how much *jazzing* the classics are doing, culminating in his dismissal of Whiteman for not doing the classics or jazz any good.

In his autobiography, Virgil Thomson appreciatively recalls *Vanity Fair* as having "proved that an organ for advertising luxury products is a good place to show far-out culture." A case in point is the May 1925 issue in which Thomson commends jazz as musical Dada. Also in this issue are "Women in the Arts" by Dorothy Richardson, "What, Exactly, is Modern?" by Aldous Huxley, poems by e. e. cummings, and "Is the Realistic Theater Obsolete?" by John Dos Passos—the occasion being the success of John Howard Lawson's *Processional: A Jazz Symphony of American Life*, unflatteringly characterized by George Jean Nathan as "an indifferent work in what may be called hoochie-coochie form." With less hostility, Lawson's subtitle points to his formal intention to engage "the wild disorder of contemporary life and the emotional exasperation which it produces." Premiering in January at the Theatre Guild, Lawson's play has been not only a success but a public event, drawing a crowd of more than seven hundred to a public debate on its merits—and, by extension, on the merits of jazz. It receives coverage in several issues of *Vanity Fair*, including a full-page photo of its star with a white saxophonist and a black guitarist. "In the picture above," the caption indicates, "you see Miss Walker with a part of the jazz band which functions in the theater of Mr. Lawson in the same way as did the chorus in the theater of Sophocles." In Dos Passos' portentous conclusion, "*Processional* is the Uncle Tom's Cabin of the new American Theatre." *Vanity Fair* implicitly renders fashionable everything it touches, and Van Vechten isn't alone leading the fashion parade of Negrophilia. Mexican stylist Covarrubia sprinkles the pages of *Vanity Fair* with the caricatures that will become enduring images of the Harlem Renaissance.

The New Negro and the New Word (1925)

With jazz enfranchised as a serious topic in the wake of Whiteman's "Experiment," and increasing evidence of commitment by "serious" composers, a veritable cascade of significant publications begins to make modernism recognizably American and plausibly indebted to a spirit shared with jazz. In 1925 alone the following novels appear: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald,

Manhattan Transfer by John Dos Passos, *Dark Laughter* by Sherwood Anderson, *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser, *The Making of Americans* by Gertrude Stein, and *The Professor's House* by Edith Wharton, not to mention Ernest Hemingway's story collection *In Our Time*, followed the next year by *The Sun Also Rises*. *In the American Grain* by William Carlos Williams is also dated 1925, along with H. D.'s *Collected Poems*, T. S. Eliot's *Poems 1909–1925* and Ezra Pound's *Draft of XVI Cantos*, two collections by e. e. cummings, *♫* and *XLI Poems*, and Robinson Jeffers' *Roan Stallion*. These titles are sandwiched by Marianne Moore's *Observations* in 1924 and Pound's collected shorter poems, *Personae*, in 1926, accompanied by Hart Crane's *White Buildings* and cummings' *Is 5*. Having featured a black lead in *The Emperor Jones* in 1920, Eugene O'Neill boldly pairs Paul Robeson with a white actress in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* in 1924—both signal events in James Weldon Johnson's celebration, *Black Manhattan*. In December 1925 Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* is published, preceded by Countee Cullen's *Color* and James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, a few months before Langston Hughes' *The Weary Blues* appears, by which point the Harlem Renaissance is in full throttle, and the rule of jazz seems unshakeable. Charles S. Johnson, writing in the Negro journal *Opportunity* in 1925, is dismayed to find jazz becoming an all-purpose term for “things typically American. . . . the gogetters want to ‘jazz up’ business, modern expressionism in art is jazz art. We have jazz bands, jazz murderers, jazz magazines!”

The Jazz Age means different things to different folks, but among literati jazz provides one more facet in an increasingly mesmerized encounter with African American culture. While the upper crust patronage of blacks persists (Charlotte Mason's stipends to Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston will not even begin until the end of 1927), the phenomenon of the New Negro is on the rise, and much of the evidence suggests a vibrant autonomy in black cultural affairs. Journals like the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger* are filled with profiles of race progress, and in the white press the publication of Hughes's “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” in the *Nation* in June 1926 reiterates an Emersonian virtue of self-reliance, newly configured in the appeal to race pride. The burden of patronage apparently being lifted from their shoulders, white enthusiasts begin to let jazz subside into diversionary entertainment. By the end of 1927, in the whites-only Cotton Club up in Harlem, the fashionable downtown set will take in the blatantly primitivist floor shows accompanied by a dapper young Negro who has just given his band

The Washingtonians a new name, The Jungle Orchestra, to match their new surroundings.

In retrospect, the timing is so precise as to seem contrived, yet the entire public furor over jazz, along with any sense that jazz and modernism overlap, evaporates just as Duke Ellington's career gets underway. Within a few years it will be impossible to think of jazz and not think of Ellington, so that to look back at the Jazz Age is to confront a bewildering anomaly: the Jazz Age lacks much of what will make jazz a vital feature of American culture long after its Age has passed. Meanwhile, the black journals of the period abstain from the jazz debate and rarely mention the music at all. But in the May 1925 issue of *Opportunity*, Charles S. Johnson pens an editorial on this "new international word" that, in its homeland, "describes not merely music and dancing but a national mood, or, better still, a jumble of moods." Reflecting the white domination of published commentary, Johnson mentions Lawson's *Processional* and cites, for technical support, Van Vechten and Seldes. But when it comes to recognizing the intrinsic irony of the situation, he speaks without deference to any authority but that of his race: "The amusing and yet profoundly significant paradox of the whole situation is the fact that it is the Negroes, who not only can best express the spirit of American life, but who have created the very forms of expression."

For Johnson as for many others of the black intelligentsia, jazz is not especially welcome among available "forms of expression." A source of casual entertainment to be sure, jazz hardly seems a candidate for uplifting the race. William Grant Still, composer of *Afro-American Symphony*, resents the expectation that he incarnate the black experience to the exclusion of anything else. Having studied with French expatriate innovator Edgard Varèse as well as producing arrangements for Paul Whiteman, Still is equally at ease with modernism and jazz and doesn't want to be typecast. Even Duke Ellington resists the term: "I am not playing jazz. I am trying to play the natural feelings of a people," he will insist in a 1930 interview. Adopting Whitmanian rhetoric in his first published article in 1931, Ellington clarifies his aspiration "that an authentic record of my race *written by a member of it* shall be placed on record." The repetition of *record* covertly attests to the medium in which he works, but Ellington clearly has the written record in mind as well: "What is being done by Countee Cullen and others in literature is overdue in our music." When, the next year, R. D. Darrell publishes the most extensive profile yet of a jazz

figure, the benchmark of his praise is by way of modernism: “Ellington to me is one of Proust’s great artists.”

“What contributions has jazz made to modernistic music?” Alain Locke wonders in one of many discussion questions heuristically provided in *The Negro and His Music*, published by The Associates in Negro Folk Education in 1936. Of the same generation as Pound and Eliot, Locke is nearly forty when his anthology *The New Negro* focuses the Harlem Renaissance, and although he respects spirituals, his attitude to music is decidedly highbrow and Eurocentric. For him, the best that can be said of jazz is that it “ushered in the first wave of the new modernistic harmony.” Consequently, “European musicians, on the look-out for a new modernistic style in music, seized eagerly upon [early jazz].” As with white boosters, Locke is interested mainly in what jazz can offer serious music composition. But, as a black man, he is uniquely informed about African American music in general. So when it comes to the nagging issue of the Jazz Age, Locke can say, without hesitation, “The Negro, strictly speaking, never had a jazz age; he was born that way.” As for the music itself, Locke takes a sociological view: “instead of blaming it on jazz, the vogue of jazz should be regarded as the symptom of a profound cultural unrest and change, first a reaction from Puritan repressions and then an escape from the tensions and monotonies of a machine-ridden, extroverted form of civilization” (88). Locke’s diagnostic stance involves little concern with the commercialization of African American folkways by white entrepreneurs. Instead, he prudently remarks that without white participation there would be no “jazz age” (presumably there would be instead “the Negro condition,” uninflected by reference to music), and the Jazz Age means modernism: “In some important way,” he suggests, “jazz has become diluted and tintured with modernism. Otherwise, as purely a Negro dialect of emotion, it could not have become the dominant recreational vogue of our time, even to date, the most prolonged fad on record.”

Master of Modernism (1927)

A 1927 advertising placard proclaims Louis Armstrong not only “King of the Trumpet” but also “Master of Modernism.” Has some ad man recognized that his versatile scatting is of a piece with Dada sound poems? Is it a furtive acknowledgment that “to call Armstrong, Waller, et al., ‘modernists’ is to appreciate their procedures as alchemists of the vernacular who have ‘jazzed’ the ordinary and given it new life”? In any event, when the bebop revolution



of the forties shakes up the jazz world, and figures like Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk are called modernists, some precedent is clearly being followed. Bop will challenge jazz orthodoxy with the same imperturbable air *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* had imposed on literature in 1922. Bebop is “one of the great modernisms,” argues Eric Lott, emphasizing its cavalier treatment of elements from pop culture, its tendency to make a virtue of defiant isolation, its assertion of aesthetic autonomy as political value, and its exploratory rigor mistaken by outsiders as ugliness. Self-assured in its resistance to accessibility, bop bears all the hallmarks of determined formal experimentation which, coupled with a creative exuberance very different from the crowd-pleasing high spirits of earlier jazz, will make it seem the embodiment of the esoteric—especially in its offbeat song titles, from “Epistrophe” to “Oblivion,” and its irreverent anthem, “Salt Peanuts.” Although bop will also become fashionable, in the romance of its first incarnation as after-hours workshop, it serves as a crucible for Parker, Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and Kenny Clarke, who incarnate a sort of musical Montmartre with their seemingly effortless avant-gardism (the quality of “cool” that proves addictive, in more ways than one, to rapt fans and fellow musicians alike). Meanwhile the Master of Modernism stands to the side, grinning and sweating, singing and playing his trumpet with a ferocity that belies his role as Satchmo, familiar darkie crooning about lazy days down on the plantation.

Jazzbandism (1931)

When the editor of *Esquire* writes his introduction to Robert Goffin's *Jazz from the Congo to the Metropolitan* (1944), he erroneously claims Goffin to be "the first serious man of letters to take jazz seriously enough to devote a book to it." In fact, Goffin is one of several "men of letters" who write books on jazz, and his 1930 *Aux Frontières du Jazz* has numerous precedents, including *Das neue Jazzbuch* by Alfred Baresel (1925), *Le Jazz* by André Coeuroy and André Schaeffner (1926), *Jazz, eine musikalische Zeitfrage* by Paul Bernhard (1927), *Jazz* by E. F. Burian (1928), and *Jazz Band* by A. G. Bragaglia (1929). There's also an intriguing 1927 jazz novel (simply called *Jazz*) by Hans Janowitz, who had studied in Prague and known Kafka, Brod, and Karl Kraus and who, prior to writing *Jazz*, had been scriptwriter for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.¹⁴ These European authors of books on



jazz all share some connection with the avant-garde. Coeuroy and Schaeffner in Paris, like Baresel and Bernhard in Germany, have links with the new music (Milhaud, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Martinů), and Coeuroy will write the scenario for Martinů's ballet *Échec du roi* (1930). Burian performs with a jazz band in a Prague cabaret and, as a composer, writes *Cocktails* for voice and jazz band (1926), a jazz opera *Bubu of Montparnasse*, and *Jazz-Requiem* (both 1928). He will go on to become one of Prague's most important theater directors. Burian's *Jazz* is published in Prague by Aventinum, home to Czech authors associated with poetism and surrealism, and it bears an epigraph from Karel Teige, the leading Czech theorist of the avant-garde:

Music, just like theater, has no idea how to keep up with the times and with the other arts. Concerts and recitals are indeed stale waters of a small fish pond . . . the revival of music . . . happens only from

¹⁴ Janowitz openly declares his right to play fast and loose with narrative conventions in his novel by appealing to the laws of jazz: "A jazz-novel has the right to fade softly in the middle of a motif's repetition and simply come to an end. To safeguard this inalienable right in the first jazz-novel having unfolded according to the laws of jazz music—well, this should naturally be granted to me."

external, secular stimuli. Though dead in the concert halls, music is alive in the world at large. Passion for living reality . . . you can hardly fear or refuse a music whose instruments and performers are still taboo—Jazz!

Bragaglia's book also comes with distinct avant-garde provenance in that he is a pioneer of futurist photography. As author of one of the key early manifestos of the movement, "Futurist Photodynamism" (1911), Bragaglia has established a protocol of syncopation for photography that has clear affinities with jazz. Like Burian, he will become increasingly involved in theater, and his monograph on jazz is one of a number of studies he publishes on contemporary arts, including dance (1928), film (1929), and the stage (1926, 1929, 1930). In fact, *Jazz Band* is less about the music than about its impact in these other fields, particularly its anti-romanticism. Despite its salutary impact, Bragaglia recognizes by the end of the 1920s jazz is on the way out, "already, for us, the face of nostalgia for our time."

The heyday of the European avant-garde was from 1910–30, after which political circumstances dissipated the utopian energies characteristic of futurism, surrealism, constructivism, and even Dada. Jazz was invariably associated, throughout the world, with high spirits and good times, and while it obviously didn't dissolve during the 1930s, its season as an emblem of modernism was past. Clive Bell's 1920 diatribe against jazz (as the manner of modernism in general) was premature in its assumption that jazz music was a passing fancy, and similar pronouncements from Cocteau's circle a few years later were also premature. But in 1931, when Ramón Gómez de la Serna publishes his book-length survey *Ismos* in Madrid, it makes sense that "Jassbandismo" appears alongside "Apollinerismo," "Picassismo," "Futurismo," "Negrismo," "Klaxismo," "Simultaneismo," "Charlotismo," "Dadaismo" and "Suprarrealismo." In a prescient forecast (and a distinctly Spanish vision), Gómez de la Serna suggests that *jazzbandism* provides the present with a forceful image of apocalypse, of a world of the dead resurrected in the carnivalesque image of jazz. Whatever the outcome, it is fitting to regard jazz tumbling with an entourage of other *isms* into the cauldron of Europe's midcentury, bearing the impetuous and confounding slogan, *no exit: no return*.



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“that an authentic record of my race”: *Ibid.*, 50.

“What is being done by Countee Cullen and others”: *Ibid.*, 50.

“Ellington to me is one of Proust’s great artists”: *Ibid.*, 64.

“What contributions has jazz made to modernistic music?": Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* 103.

“ushered in the first wave”: *Ibid.*, 81.

“European musicians”: *Ibid.*, 85.

“The Negro, strictly speaking”: *Ibid.*, 87.

“Instead of blaming it on jazz”: *Ibid.*, 88.

“In some important way”: *Ibid.*, 90.

Master of Modernism (1927)

“to call Armstrong, Waller, et al.”: Alfred Appel Jr., *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 13.

“one of the great modernisms”: O’Meally, *Jazz Cadence* 462.

Jazzbandism (1931)

“the first serious man of letters”: Arnold Gingrich, “Introduction,” Goffin, *Jazz from the Congo* ix.

n. 14 “A jazz-novel has the right to fade softly”: Jürgen Grandt, *Kinds of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 81.

“Music, just like theater”: E. F. Burian, *Jazz* (Prague: Aventinum, 1928), epigraph.

“already, for us, the face of nostalgia”: A. G. Bragaglia, *Jazz Band* (Milan: Edizioni ‘Corbaccio,’ 1929), 9. My translation.

jazzbandism provides the present with a forceful image of apocalypse: see Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Obras Completas*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1957), 1062.