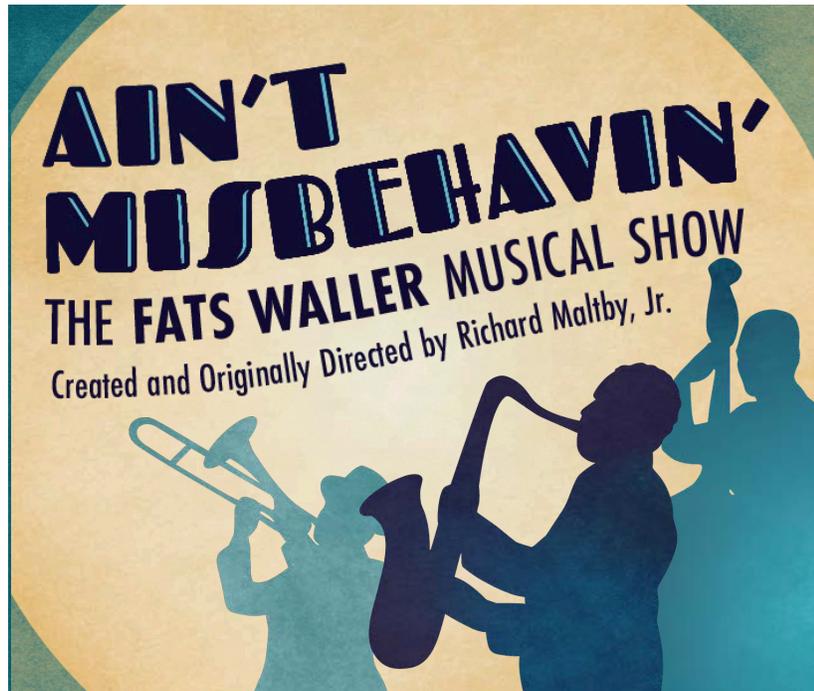


Study Guide

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About the Show

Ain't Misbehavin' is a musical revue celebrating the music of Thomas Wright "Fats" Waller, conceived by Murray Horwitz and Richard Maltby, Jr. and arranged and orchestrated by Luther Henderson. Most of the music is by Waller, although the show ends with a variety of songs written by others that Waller made famous. It opened in New York in February 1978 and transferred to Broadway in May of that year. It later closed in February 1982 after more than 1,600 performances.

The original production won three Best/Outstanding Musical awards (Tony, Drama Desk, and New York Drama Critics) and two other Tonys: one for Best Direction of a musical (Maltby) and one for Featured Actress in a Musical (Nell Carter). The original cast recording also won a Grammy in 1979 for Best Musical Theatre Album.

Ain't Misbehavin' was revived separately in both England and the US in 1995. Years later, in 2008–09, a 30th anniversary national tour of the show starred American Idol veterans Frenchie Davis, Trenyce Cobbins, and Ruben Studdard.

What's a Revue



A musical revue is a show with a selection of musical numbers, organized around an artist (like Fats Waller) or theme, not around a linear plot. *Ain't Misbehavin'* is a revue celebrating Waller's work: a series of songs written by or made famous by Waller, tied together with only the briefest of spoken interludes.

Setting

The songs featured in *Ain't Misbehavin'* are from Waller's whole career, spanning from the 1920s to the 1940s—our production specifically focuses on the 1930s. As part of the Harlem Renaissance, New York saw Black musicians, artists, and intellectuals coming together to make Harlem the epicenter of American culture in the '20s and early '30s. Nightclubs like the Cotton Club, the Savoy Ballroom, Small's Paradise, The Alhambra, and The Apollo were major features of the neighborhood and are the visual and musical inspiration for this production.

Director Bretteney Beverly gathered a variety of images from Harlem nightclubs in the '30's to show her designers the look and feel she was interested in for this production; many of those images are gathered here. Does looking at these give you any sense of what you might expect at this production?

Did you know?

The rich, vibrant colors of costume designer Danielle Nieves's costumes are meant to express the show's core values of joy and exuberance. The costumes are so exuberant that scenic designer Mark Lund decided to tone down his own colors and textures so as to not clash with the costumes.



Did you know?

Ain't Misbehavin' was conceived by Richard Maltby, Jr. and Murraray Horwitz, composed/arranged by Luther Henderson, and choreographed by Arthur Faria. Of the group, only Henderson was Black; the others were white. While many critics have praised the show for its authenticity in presenting the music of the Harlem Renaissance, and its ability to bring Waller's music to a new generation, other critics have been troubled that its creators were of such a different place, time, and culture.

About Fats Waller

Thomas "Fats" Waller (May 21, 1904–December 15, 1943) was an American jazz pianist, organist, composer, and singer. His innovations in the Harlem stride style laid much of the basis for modern jazz piano. A widely popular star in the jazz and swing eras, he toured internationally, achieving critical and commercial success in the United States and Europe. His best-known compositions, "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose", were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1984 and 1999, respectively.

Waller copyrighted over 400 songs, many of them co-written with his closest collaborator, Andy Razaf. Razaf described his partner as "the soul of melody... a man who made the piano sing... both big in body and in mind... known for his generosity... a bubbling bundle of joy". It is likely that Waller composed many more popular songs than he has been credited with. When in financial difficulties, he had a habit of selling songs to other writers and performers who claimed them as their own.

Waller was born in New York City on May 21, 1904, the seventh child of eleven (five of whom survived childhood). Thomas Waller, nicknamed "Fats" in his childhood, started playing the piano at the age of six. He also studied the double bass and violin, paying for music lessons by working in a grocery store. At the age of 15, he became an organist at the Lincoln Theatre.



Photo of Thomas "Fats" Waller (heroesofjazz.com)

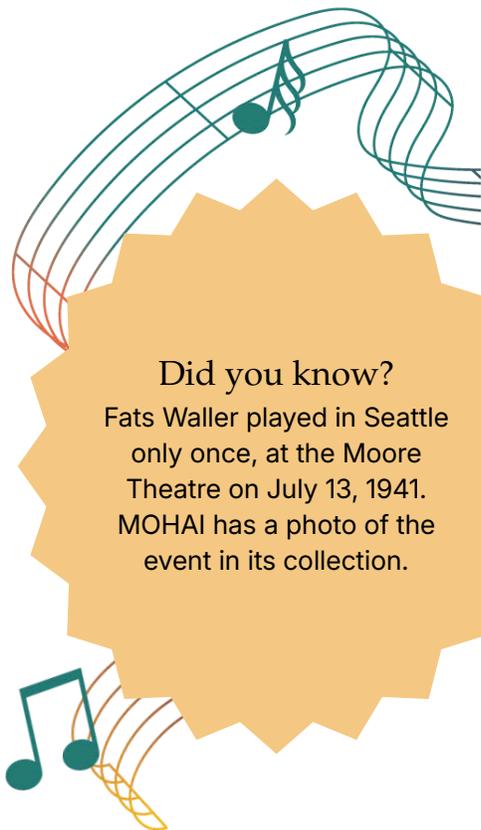


Photo of Fats Waller (Left) and James P. Johnson (Right)
(heroesofjazz.com)

Through a friend, Waller met James P. Johnson, a leading figure of the burgeoning Harlem stride style of piano playing. Johnson began to teach Waller piano and introduce him to important figures of the Harlem music scene, bringing him to rent parties where they would perform.

In 1921, Waller was invited to accompany a vaudeville group on a tour of the northeast of the US. While in Boston, he met Count Basie, who asked for organ lessons—these took place back in New York. After his return, Waller began to play in New York more extensively.

Waller became involved with the new recording label Okeh Records and made his first recordings in 1922. He continued playing and recording throughout the '20s; the first recording of him singing came out in 1927 and he wrote "Ain't Misbehavin'" in 1929. To avoid having to pay more in child support, Waller sold the rights for twenty of his songs (including "Ain't Misbehavin'") to Irving Mills for \$500, a small fraction of their value.



Did you know?
Fats Waller played in Seattle only once, at the Moore Theatre on July 13, 1941. MOHAI has a photo of the event in its collection.



Fats Waller at the Moore Theatre, Seattle, July 13, 1941
MOHAI, Al Smith Collection, 2014.49.002.039.0192

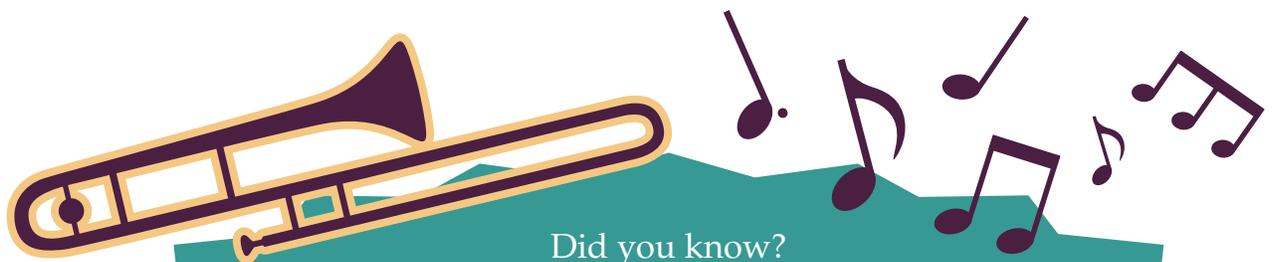
Waller's radio career began in 1930 and by 1934 he had his own show. The Fats Waller Band formed and began to tour in 1935, but Waller's drinking became heavier and his behavior more erratic, and interest from promoters declined after a racially-motivated boycott led to poor attendance in 1937. Tours of Scandinavia and Britain fared better and eventually revived his career in the US. In an attempt to make audiences take jazz more seriously, Waller performed at Carnegie Hall in 1942. In 1943 Waller became the first Black composer to write songs for a white Broadway cast (in the show *Early to Bed*).



Fats Waller and his Rhythm – 1938 left to right: Slick Jones, Herman Autrey, Fats Waller, Cedric Wallace, Albert Casey, Eugene Sedric. (syncopatedtimes.com)

In 1938, Waller was one of the first African Americans to purchase a home in the Addisleigh Park section of St. Albans, Queens, a New York City community with racially restrictive covenants. After his purchase, and litigation in the New York State courts, many prosperous African Americans followed.

Murray Horwitz wrote of Waller, "Fats was as generous as he was overindulging, and stories of his bigheartedness and high living abound. He consumed enormous quantities of food and liquor. He bought instruments for down-and-out musicians, loaned money to friends without being asked and treated himself to a \$10,000 Lincoln automobile. Often, however, his alimony troubles would leave him broke and in jail, writing songs for Tin Pan Alley publishers in exchange for bail money. The party that was Fats Waller's life ended suddenly, when he died of pneumonia aboard the Santa Fe Chief in 1943."



Did you know?

"Black and Blue" is credited with being one of the earliest examples of a jazz song that directly addresses racism. In 1965 (three weeks after "Bloody Sunday" and the attack on the marches in Selma), Louis Armstrong revived "Black and Blue" (a song that he hadn't played in over ten years) and performed it in East Berlin as part of his international tour. Armstrong reclaimed the jazz classic as a song of racial protest, and would continue to play it for the rest of his life.

Waller's Role in Music History

(Online viewers of this section can click on the [bolded underlined portions](#) to access YouTube videos for reference.)

African American musicians in the 1870s and 1880s began to take the popular dance music of the day (much of it African-influenced), add some elements of marches (largely European-influenced), and develop it into Ragtime, largely for solo piano. The left hand featured an “oom-pah” style bass based on marches, alternating bass notes and chords. The innovation was in the right hand, which featured a syncopated rhythm not found in marches. Ragtime music was composed, not improvised.

Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag in 1899 was a hit and popularized the style more broadly.

James P. Johnson, playing in an era that was experiencing the improvisation of early jazz music, developed a more improvised style of play called “stride” piano in the 1910s. In it, the left hand “strides” up and down the piano to play a larger range of notes than in ragtime; it's also no longer playing the strict rhythms of marches. Both hands have more leeway to improvise on the melodic theme, and thus the music no longer needs to be written down. Fats Waller learned stride piano from Johnson, known as one of its best practitioners, and popularized it.

Note the difference in left hand movement on **Waller's Handful of Keys (1929)**, as well as the increased complexity of the rhythm. This song appears in *Ain't Misbehavin'*.

Waller helped lead the change in syncopation that led stride piano into the swing era. Swing music creates a sense of forward momentum by dividing each beat into two 8th notes and then playing one slightly longer than the other.

Waller's Yacht Club Swing (1938), is a stride song showing some of the journey from stride to swing and the increasing rhythmic complexity of the piano's right hand. You'll hear this song in *Ain't Misbehavin'* as well.

Sing Sing Sing by Benny Goodman (1937) is one of the most famous swing songs and has left some of the stride style behind—note the much less energetic left hand—but retains the rhythmic complexity of swing.

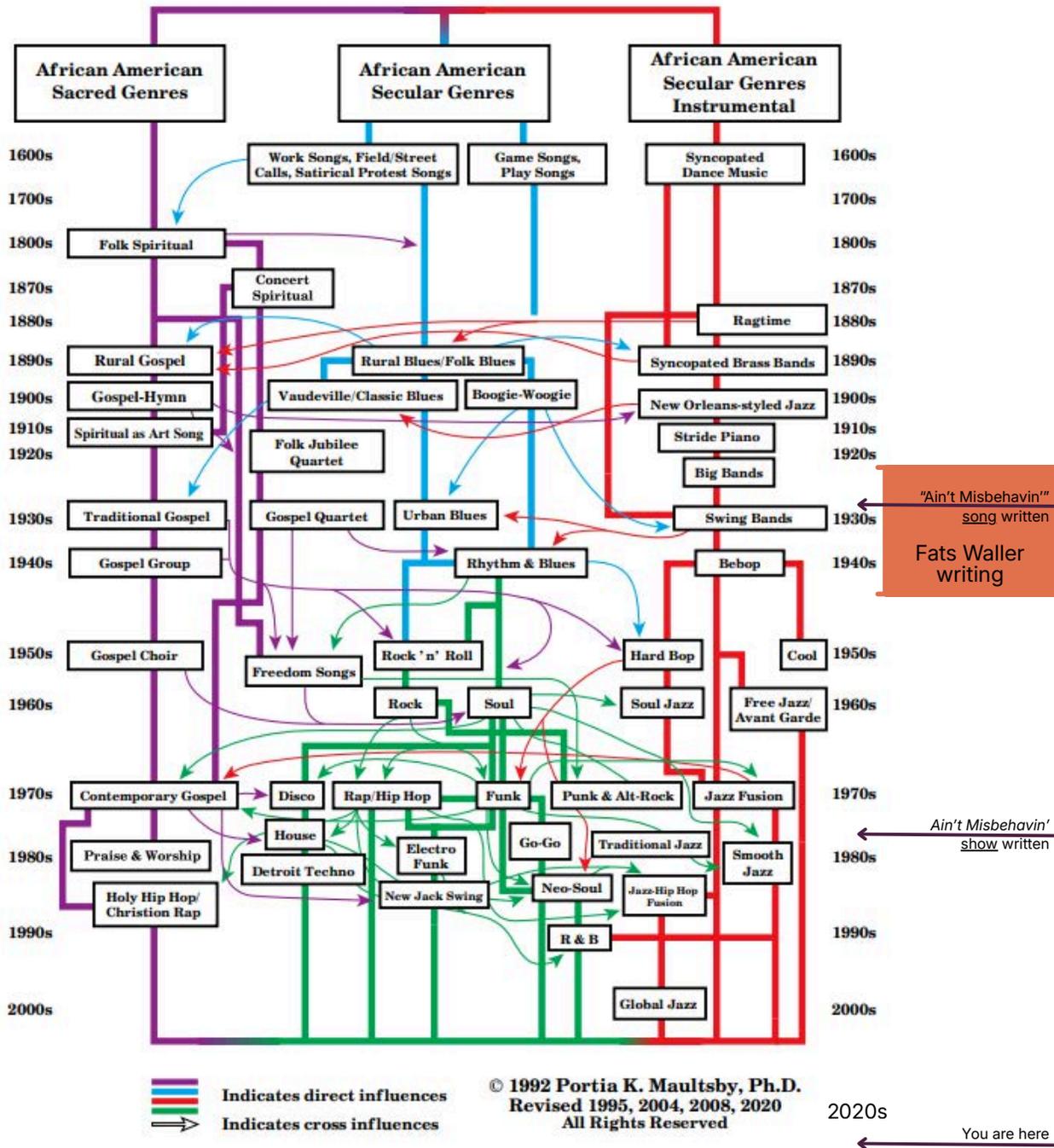


Did you know?

Caricatures of Fats Waller, Cab Calloway, and Stepin Fetchit appear in the 1938 Disney cartoon “Mother Goose Goes Hollywood”. The caricatures are clearly racist and Disney has attempted to block access to the cartoon. At the same time, the cartoon presents the figures as celebrities, highlighting the complicated reactions of white America to these new stars. Today, the cartoon can sometimes be found online in “response” videos, in which the video's main focus is the creator's response to the cartoon and not the cartoon itself.

"The Evolution of African American Music" gives a good sense of where these musical trends came from and where they later developed.

The Evolution of African American Music



Other changes in music during this period include the move from small bands to larger orchestras. At the same time similar changes were occurring in dance styles. Dances like the Lindy Hop introduced improvisation to dancing, while The Shimmy brought a more relaxed attitude toward sexuality into the dance hall; the dance and attitude were then adopted by white performers, notably Mae West.

Characters in The Show

Ken



Yusef Seevers

Andre



Chandler T.
Thomas

Charlaine



Alexandria J.
Henderson

Nell



Erica Walker

Armelia



Sarah Russell

Understudies



Brodrick Santeze
Ryans



Ania Briggs



Sophia Mendez



Did you know?

The names of the characters that you see in the program are the names of the original actors who created the characters in the show's first production in 1978: Nell Carter, André De Shields, Armelia McQueen, Ken Page, and Charlayne Woodard. De Shields and Woodard are still performing. De Shields is currently starring in *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, which is moving from Off-Broadway to Broadway just as our production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* opens. He recently originated the character of Hermes in *Hadestown*. Woodard recently appeared as Priscilla Fury in Marvel Studios' *Secret Invasion* miniseries. She appeared onstage at Seattle Rep in 2005 in *Purgatorio*.

Pre-show Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt that encountering a work of art led you to understand the emotions of the artist? If so, how do you think the artist achieved that effect? If not, do you have any sense of why not?
2. Do you think that the experience of seeing a musical is different than that of seeing a play? Why or why not? Do you think that the experience of a musical revue is different than that of seeing a musical that tells a single story? Why or why not?
3. What is a three-dimensional character? How can an actor create a three-dimensional character in a musical revue that doesn't give them much in the way of lyrics or backstory?
4. Does it matter if Waller wrote some of the most famous songs of his era, if he sold the rights to them and his name is no longer on them? Why or why not?
5. Read Langston Hughes's 1926 essay, "[The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)" (www.poetryfoundation.org). Think about the two different kinds of Black Americans he describes. As you watch the show, think about where the characters fit into this dichotomy, or if they show elements of both.

Things to Think About While Watching the Show

1. Fats Waller used music as both an escape from and a reflection of his society, and like many African-American artists of his day, had to occasionally put on a metaphorical mask to be able to perform safely in front of white audiences. One of director Brettney Beverly's interests in this show is where that mask slips. Look for the moments that the mask slips and you see the real artist underneath. How do those get presented to the audience?
2. How do you imagine the experience of watching this show is different at a moment where the contributions of African-Americans are actively being erased from American history? How do you imagine the experience of staging the show would be different?

Post-show Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Did any of the melodies or rhythms in the musical remind you of contemporary music you listen to? If so, how?
2. Song lyrics throughout music history have talked about physical intimacy. Do you think the song lyrics of *Ain't Misbehavin'* are more or less suggestive than those of contemporary popular music?
3. Think about the song (or songs) in the show that had the most serious topics. Now think about where in the course of the show that music appeared. Why do you think the show's creators chose to put that music in that part of the show? Does that give you any insight into their (or the director's) goals for staging the show?
4. Have a look at the collage of inspirational images our director pulled together to identify the look and feel she wanted to capture in this production (page 2). Imagine that you've been asked to direct a production with a different look and feel. What kinds of images would you gather to give to your designers? How do you think the effect of your production would be different than this one?
5. Fats Waller was known for his contributions to music history and to his efforts to expand the rights of African-Americans in his day. Find another artist of the Harlem Renaissance who is also known for both artistic and social contributions to society. Can you find one similarity and one difference between that artist and Waller? Does the exercise give you any insight into anything you saw on stage in *Ain't Misbehavin'*?

1930s Harlem Renaissance Timeline

The Harlem Renaissance was a movement in New York in the 1920s and 30s that involved an advancement of African American contributions to artistic fields of all types, as well as the fields of politics and scholarship. Notable moments from this movement in the 1930s era in which our production is set include:

1930

Howard University Gallery of Art opens, one of the first galleries to feature Black art.

1931

William Grant Still becomes the first African American to have his music performed by a major orchestra, his Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American" Symphony by the Rochester Philharmonic.

1932

Thomas Dorsey combines gospel and blues in "Take My Hand, Precious Lord".
The Los Angeles Sentinel, one of the earliest Black publications, is published.

1934

Zorah Neale Hurston publishes her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, pushing boundaries in its representation of African-Americans.

1935

Count Basie establishes the Count Basie Orchestra.

1938

Jacob Lawrence debuts his work in an exhibition at the Harlem YMCA.

1939

The Negro Actors Guild of America is founded.
Marian Anderson sings at the Lincoln Memorial after being denied the chance to sing at Constitution Hall because she was Black.

Terms and Cultural References

(In alphabetical order)

Beats me to my socks

"Beats to my socks" meant being emotionally or physically overwhelmed by something exciting or intense, not just tired.

Boiler works

A "boiler works" is a facility that designs, fabricates, repairs, or services large industrial boilers, essential for generating steam or hot water.

Cash For Your Trash

WWII scrap drives were massive home front campaigns for civilians to donate or sell junk for the war effort, turning "cash for trash" into patriotism.

Cats

Jazz musicians call each other cat as a sign of respect. No one knows exactly how it started; one theory is that it comes from the fact that jazz musicians were out late at night, like cats.

Cut a rug

The phrase "cut a rug," meaning to dance energetically, originated in the 1920s and 1930s, when dancers moved so intensely that their feet seemed to "cut" or tear up the floor covering.

Die before I'm forty

A biographical reference to Fats Waller, who lived hard and died young at 39. These added lyrics to T'Aint Nobody's Business are a biographical reference to Fats Waller.

Don't pay my alimony

Also a biographical reference to Fats Waller, who was famously taken to court for not paying alimony to his first wife.

The nylons of DuPont/in a world that Mr. Wallace planned

Dr. Wallace Carothers had a lab at DuPont, an American chemical company. He invented nylon in 1935.

They're making duses of all the chantueses

A chanteuse is a French term for a female singer, especially, one who performs popular songs in nightclubs. Duses may refer to standardized or mass-marketed personas, in contrast to more talented singers.

Every Mose is on his toes

In the 1920s, "mose" was a slang term for a black man, especially, one who was subservient to white

Get your pigfeet, beer and gin

Pig's feet (or trotters) are a classic, historically significant part of Southern soul food, symbolizing resourcefulness and resilience by using the whole animal.

Hep or hip

Slang. Origin unknown. "Very fashionable, or being aware of the latest trends."

High Hattin'

Slang. To act in a superciliously indulgent manner: condescend, patronize.

In the groove

"In the groove" is slang meaning performing or functioning perfectly, originating from jazz musicians finding a perfect rhythm

Jitterbug

Jitterbug is a generalized term used to describe swing dancing and swing dancers

Juke Joint

Juke joint is the African-American vernacular term for an informal establishment featuring music, dancing, gambling, and drinking.

Junior jerks

The origin of the insult "jerk" is not certain, but one theory is that it comes from the slang term "jerk-water", meaning "petty, inferior, insignificant." This is a late 1800s reference to certain railroad lines where in some rural stops a steam locomotive crew had to haul boiler water because there was no water tank.

Killer-Diller

Jazz age slang. A person or thing that is astonishing , outstanding , or exciting .

Leaves me on the rocks

Slang. "in trouble or approaching ruin," i.e. "a marriage that is on the rocks"

The Mutual Broadcasting System

The Mutual Broadcasting System was an American commercial radio network in operation from 1934 to 1999. It aired The Lone Ranger and The Shadow.

NBC Blue Network

The NBC Blue Network was the on-air name of a former American radio network, which broadcast from 1927 through 1945; in 1945, it became the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).

Feels like Old Ned

"Old Ned" is a slang term for The Devil.

You feel like peckin'

"Peckin'" refers to a popular dance style introduced at the Cotton Club in 1937. The "Peckin'" was characterized by jerky head motions that mimic a chicken pecking.

Raggin'

In the 1920s, the slang term raggin' (or ragging) referred to the act of teasing, mocking, ridiculing, or heckling someone.

Reet sweet music

"Reet" is a slang term with roots in 1930s-40s American jazz jargon, primarily meaning excellent or fantastic.

Shim-Sham Dance

The Shim Sham, known as tap dance's national anthem, originated in the 1920s as the "Goofus," a simple tap routine. It became a staple in Harlem clubs and was later popularized for Swing dancers.

Show me the ring and I'll jump right through...

"Show me the ring and I'll jump right through" means a strong, immediate willingness to commit to marriage or a serious relationship.

People who live on Sutton

Sutton Place runs from 57th to 59th Streets. The streets are considered among the city's most affluent.

Ten grand Lincoln

The phrase "ten grand Lincoln" refers to a story associated with Fats Waller's lavish lifestyle, specifically that he paid \$10,000 for a custom Lincoln limousine.

Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley exists both as a cultural construct, and as a physical place, on West 28th Street between Fifth and Broadway in Manhattan. It included sheet music stores and other music-related businesses.

You feel like truckin'

In the 1930s, truckin' was a dance craze that originated in Harlem. The dance involved waving an index finger over your head while shuffling and was often combined with other moves similar to swing dancing.

Viper

In 1930s slang, a "viper" was someone who smoked marijuana.

WACS

The Women's Army Corps (WAC) during WWII was the women's branch of the U.S. Army, allowing women to serve in vital non-combat roles like clerks, mechanics, radio operators, and cryptographers.

The Waldorf

The Waldorf Astoria New York is a luxury hotel and condominium residence in the Midtown Manhattan neighborhood of New York City, and one of the world's most prestigious and best-known hotels.

You got the world in a jug, stopper in your hand

The slang phrase "you got the world in a jug, stopper in your hand" means having absolute control, power, or command over a situation.

Taproot Theatre Company's Education Programs



Camps & Classes

Taproot Theatre Company's Acting Studio offers year-round instructional programs for theatre artists of all ages and experience levels. We are devoted to creating a nurturing environment to help students develop their unique gifts.

In addition to acting classes for adults, we offer improv classes for seniors experiencing early-stage memory loss.



School Touring Productions

Taproot's Road Company uses research-backed strategies from the Committee for Children's Second Step curriculum to help students build empathy, manage emotions, and stand up for themselves and others. Since 1985, the Road Company has brought professional theatre to schools across Washington State, reaching more than 70,000 K-12 students each year with our dynamic bullying-prevention plays that educate and inspire.



In-School Residencies & Workshops

From drama games to acting classes to putting on a production, Taproot Theatre's residencies bring educational theatre directly to schools. Our theatre arts professionals visit classrooms for workshops that excite students. Students develop basic acting skills and explore non-theatre curriculum using theatre as a medium.