

"I protested, telling him that I hadn't led the band since February, but he insisted. Well, I went back to my band, and with it I went to Paris. What was to be our only concert was in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Before we had played two numbers the audience went wild. We had conquered Paris. General Bliss and French high officers who had heard us insisted that we should stay in Paris, and there we stayed for eight weeks. Everywhere we gave a concert it was a riot, but the supreme moment came in the Tuileries Gardens when we gave a concert in conjunction with the greatest bands in the world—the British Grenadiers' Band, the Band of the Garde Républicain, and the Royal Italian Band. My band, of course, could not compare with any of these, yet the crowd, and it was such a crowd as I never saw anywhere else in the world, deserted them for us. We played to 50,000 people at least, and, had we wished it, we might be playing yet.

"After the concert was over the leader of the band of the Garde Républicain came over and asked me for the score of one of the jazz compositions we had played. He said he wanted his band to play it. I gave it to him and the next day he again came to see me. He explained that he couldn't seem to get the effects I got, and asked me to go to a rehearsal. I went with him. The great band had played the composition superbly—but he was right: the jazz effects were missing. I took an instrument and showed him how it could be done, and he told me that his own musicians felt sure that my band had used special instruments. Indeed, some of them, afterward attending one of my rehearsals, did not believe what I had said until after they had examined the instruments used by my men.

"I have come back from France more firmly convinced than ever that negroes should write negro music. We have our own racial feeling and if we try to copy whites we will make bad copies. I noticed that the Morocco negro bands played music which had an affinity to ours. One piece, 'In Zanzibar,' I took for my band, and though white audiences seem to find it too discordant, I found it most sympathetic. We won France by playing music which was ours and not a pale imitation of others, and if we are to develop in America we must develop along our own lines. Our musicians do their best work when using negro material. Will Marion Cook, William Tynes, even Harry Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor are not truly themselves [except] in the music which expresses their race. Mr. Tynes, for instance, writes charming waltzes, but the best of these have in them negro influences. The music of our race springs from the soil, and this is true today of no other race, except possibly the Russians, and it is because of this that I and all my musicians have come to love Russian music. Indeed, as far as I am concerned, it is the only music I care for outside of negro."

## 6. Jazzing Away Prejudice

ALTHOUGH MUSIC IS OFTEN DISMISSED AS mere entertainment, this 1919 editorial argues that musical performances can have profound political effects. It appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, one of the country's leading black newspapers, in response to a concert by James Reese Europe and his band.

With the ringing down of the curtain at the Auditorium last Saturday night there closed a remarkable period of band concerts. If you were not fortunate enough to attend you missed a rare treat. This band had made a wonderful record with their American expeditionary forces in France and with its jazz music had proved a source of great entertainment wherever it went. When it returned to the United States it was given a great ovation by the people of New York City, and Chicago found it equal to advance notice. It has all the artistic finish of any band that has invaded these parts in many years. We doubt seriously that Creature at his best could have furnished better entertainment.<sup>1</sup> The audiences were highly responsive and rewarded each number with the most spirited applause. The closing number of the program, "In Nigger Man's Land," in which the house was thrown into darkness and all the noises of the battlefield reproduced, furnished a thriller that was a fitting finale to a splendid evening's entertainment.

We hope the swing of Europe and his band around the country will be nationwide. The most prejudiced enemy of our Race could not sit through an evening with Europe without coming away with a changed viewpoint. For he is compelled in spite of himself to see us in a new light. It is a well-known fact that the white people view us largely from the standpoint of the cook, porter, and waiter, and his limited opportunities are responsible for much of the distorted opinion held concerning us. Europe and his band are worth more to our Race than a thousand speeches from so-called Race orators and uplifters. Mere wind-jamming has never given any race material help. It may be entertaining in a way to rectify to audiences of our own people in a flamboyant style the doings of the Race, but the spellbinder's efforts, being confined almost exclusively to audiences of our own people, is of as much help in properly presenting our cause to those whom we desire most to reach as a man trying to lift

Source: "Jazzing Away Prejudice," *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1919, p. 20.

1. Giuseppe Creature (1871–1952) was a successful conductor, impresario, composer, and band leader. [RWJ]

himself by pulling at his own bootstraps. Experience has shown that most of our spellbinders are in it for what there is in it. The good they do is nil.

Europe and his band are demonstrating what our people can do in a field where the results are bound to be of the greatest benefit. He has the white man's ear because he is giving the white man something new. He is meeting a popular demand and in catering to this love of syncopated music he is jazzing away the barriers of prejudice.

## 7. The "Inventor of Jazz"

BORN AND RAISED IN NEW ORLEANS, JELLY ROLL MORTON (1890–1941; born Ferdinand Lamothe) was working as a pianist in the sporting houses of the city's Storyville district by the time he had reached his twelfth birthday. Morton began traveling around 1904—gambling, shooting pool, hustling, and playing the piano—and by 1917 had ranged as far as New York and Los Angeles. Throughout this period he absorbed many kinds of music—ragtime, blues, hymns, minstrel songs, Tin Pan Alley songs, and Caribbean music with its “Spanish tinge”—blending them together and helping to spread the emerging style that was becoming known as jazz. The recordings Morton made in Chicago in the mid-1920s announced a new fusion of improvisation and composition, leading some historians to hail Morton as the first jazz composer.

These selections are taken from Alan Lomax's *Mister Jelly Roll*, a book based on a series of recorded interviews Lomax conducted with Morton in 1938. Although Lomax admitted to having “polished” the prose, he preserved a remarkable autobiographical statement by one of the most important musicians in jazz. Morton's account evokes the rich diversity of musical life in New Orleans and provides an insider's explanation of how jazz developed and how it works. Morton touches on personal problems of identity—as a light-skinned Creole, and as a man playing an instrument that was largely identified with women—at the same time that his story shows how he belonged to the tradition of piano “professors”: boastful, vain, and competitive virtuosi who cultivated

a dandified image (Morton had a diamond set in one of his front teeth, and bragged that he was “the suit man from suit land”). His claim that he was the “inventor of jazz” and the false birth date he gave in order to support this assertion should be understood in this light, although it's probably true that no one could make a better case than he.

Of course, my folks never had the idea they wanted a musician in the family. They always had it in their minds that a musician was a tramp, trying to duck work, with the exception of the French Opera House players which they patronized. As a matter of fact, I, myself, was inspired to play piano by going to a recital at the French Opera House. There was a gentleman who rendered a selection on the piano, very marvelous music that made me want to play the piano very, very much. The only trouble was that this gentleman had long bushy hair, and, because the piano was known in our circle as an instrument for a lady, this confirmed me in my idea that if I played the piano I would be misunderstood.

I didn't want to be called a sissy. I wanted to marry and raise a family and be known as a man among men when I became of age. So I studied various other instruments, such as violin, drums and guitar, until one day at a party I saw a gentleman sit down at the piano and play a very good piece of ragtime. This particular gentleman had short hair and I decided then that the instrument was good for a gentleman same as it was for a lady. I must have been about ten years old at the time.



So in the year of 1902 when I was about seventeen years old I happened to invade one of the sections where the birth of jazz originated from. Some friends took me to The Frenchman's on the corner of Villeray and Bienville, which was at that time the most famous nightspot after everything was closed. It was only a back room, but it was where all the greatest pianists frequented after they got off from work in the sporting-houses. About four a.m., unless plenty of money was involved on their jobs, they would go to The Frenchman's and there would be everything in the line of hilarity there.

All the girls that could get out of their houses was there. The millionaires would come to listen to their favorite pianists. There weren't any discrimination of any kind. They all sat at different tables or anywhere they felt like sitting. They all mingled together just as they wished to and everyone was just like one big happy family. People came from all over the country and most times you couldn't get in. So this place would go on at a tremendous rate of speed—plenty money, drinks of all kinds—from four o'clock in the morning until maybe twelve, one, two, or three o'clock in the daytime. Then, when the great pianists used to leave, the crowds would leave.

New Orleans was the stomping grounds for all the greatest pianists in the country. We had Spanish, we had colored, we had white, we had Frenchmen, we had Americans, we had them from all parts of the world because there were more jobs for pianists than any other ten places in the world. The sporting-houses needed professors, and we had so many different styles that whenever you came to New Orleans, it wouldn't make any difference that you just came from Paris or any part of England, Europe, or any place—whatever your tunes were over there, we played them in New Orleans.

