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Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.



**CAMERON MACKINTOSH**

presents



A Musical by **CLARKE PETERS**

Featuring **LOUIS JORDAN's** Greatest Hits

Originally Produced at the Theatre Royal Stratford East

Produced on the West End and on Broadway by

**CAMERON MACKINTOSH**

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## About *Five Guys Named Moe*

*Five Guys Named Moe*, an exuberant, creative tribute to the music of rhythm and blues pioneer and alto saxophonist Louis Jordan, is a show about the way popular music can reflect and shape our emotions. Blues–jazz–boogie great Jordan was a lyricist, composer, sax player, band leader and singer who is considered one of the forerunners of rock.

The creator of *Five Guys Named Moe*, actor, dancer, singer and director Clarke Peters, grew up in Harlem at the intersection of 155th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Remembering his love for the comical lyrics and jazzy beat of Jordan’s music that emerged from his family radio throughout his childhood, Peters created *Five Guys Named Moe* as an homage to this musical giant.

*Five Guys Named Moe* is a joyful celebration that allows Jordan’s off-beat, rhythmic music to speak for itself. Built around an irrepressibly energetic quintet of zoot-suited singers named Moe who emerge from a radio to offer advice to a young love-sick man named Nomax, the show is a high-spirited journey through Jordan’s hits.

Filled with humor and pathos, the music of Louis Jordan is lovingly presented in *Five Guys Named Moe* in the form of a “revusical” that invites the audience to sing, dance, have a wonderful time and return to the world smiling.

## The Characters in *Five Guys Named Moe*

NOMAX – A young man avoiding commitment to his girlfriend

THE FIVE GUYS (who pop out of the radio):

BIG MOE

LITTLE MOE

NO MOE

EAT MOE

FOUR-EYED MOE

## Synopsis

In *Five Guys Named Moe*, the brooding young hero, Nomax, is down and out at 4:45 A.M., drinking, smoking and feeling sorry for himself because his woman has left him and he is in financial distress. He is sitting alone by his radio yearning for the girlfriend he has treated badly. Suddenly the *Five Guys Named Moe* magically jump out of his '30s radio in a puff of smoke. They invade his apartment to give him some rollicking, bluesy lessons about life, love and women through a series of be-bop, swing and calypso songs either written or recorded by Louis Jordan.

The five uninvited guys who are unleashed like genies from a bottle make it their business to teach Nomax to be a man. Jiving and jumping across the stage, they gleefully take him and the audience on a tour of their fantasy world. They perform a continuing vaudeville based on Jordan's rousing, rhythmic, comedic songs as they sympathize, harmonize and show Nomax the error of his ways.

In the course of the evening, the fast-talking *Five Guys Named Moe* take on the job of improving Nomax's attitude and image. They use Jordan's inimitable style to show him how to laugh at, learn about and grow in his relationships with women. The show celebrates male/female relationships through songs filled with romantic advice, confession and accusation. The Five Guys get to the heart of the matter when they ask the ultimate human question in the climactic number, "Is You Is or Is You Ain't Ma' Baby?"

As the Five Guys transform Nomax, the show becomes a party-on-stage, dancing-in-the-aisles, tap-your-feet, put-a-smile-on-your-face kind of experience. In the course of the evening the audience joins in, dancing with the cast in a conga line and singing words printed on pieces of paper distributed by ushers.

At the end of the show, Nomax has learned his lesson about life and love and the Five Guys depart, happy with a job well done.

## Musical Numbers

### ACT ONE

EARLY IN THE MORNING (Louis Jordan/ Leo Hickman/ Dallas Bartley)

FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE (Larry Wynn/ Jerry Bresler)

BEWARE, BROTHER, BEWARE (Morry Lasco/ Dick Adams/ Fleecie Moore)

I LIKE 'EM FAT LIKE THAT (Claude Demetriou/ Louis Jordan)

MESSY BESSY (Jon Hendricks)

PETTIN' AND POKIN' (Lora Lee)

LIFE IS SO PECULIAR (Johnny Burke/ Jimmy Van Heusen)

I KNOW WHAT I'VE GOT (Sid Robin/ Louis Jordan)

AZURE TE (Bill Davis/ Don Wolf)

KNOCK ME A KISS (Mike Jackson/ Andy Razaf)

SAFE, SANE AND SINGLE (Louis Jordan/ Johnny Lange/ Hy Heath)

PUSH KA PI SHI PIE (Joe Willoughby/ Louis Jordan/ Dr. Walt Merrick)

(Intermission)

### ACT TWO

PUSH KA PI SHI PIE (Instrumental reprise)

SATURDAY NIGHT FISH FRY (Ellis Walsh/ Louis Jordan)

WHAT'S THE USE OF GETTING SOBER (Busby Meyers)

IF I HAD ANY SENSE (R. McCoy/ C. Singleton)

DAD GUM YA HIDE BOY (Guy Browley, Jr.)

THE CABARET:

FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL (Fleecie Moore/ Sam Theard)

REET, PETITE AND GONE (Spencer Lee/ Louis Jordan)

CALDONIA (Fleecie Moore)

AIN'T NOBODY HERE BUT US CHICKENS (Joan Whitney/ Alex Kramer)

DON'T LET THE SUN CATCH YOU CRYING (Jo Greene)

CHOO, CHOO, CH'BOOGIE (Vaughn Horton/ Denver Darling/  
Milton Gabler)

LOOK OUT, SISTER (Sid Robin/ Louis Jordan)

MEDLEY:

HURRY HOME (Joseph Meyer/ Buddy Bernier/ Robert Emmerich)

IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T MA' BABY? (S. Austin/ Louis Jordan)

DON'T LET THE SUN CATCH YOU CRYING (Reprise)

FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE

## Themes and Topics to Explore

### Questions and Assignments

Our study guide focuses on a wide-ranging list of themes and topics that are suggested by *Five Guys Named Moe*. Avenues for exploring each theme and topic are suggested in the form of:

#### Questions:

Designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the show.

#### Assignments:

Designed to be researched and written out of class.

## Themes and Topics to Explore

### Louis Jordan, Humor and Pathos

#### Questions/Discussion Prompts

- Louis Jordan once said, “The blues, that’s me. Not the crying blues but the blues with a joke in it. Something funny to make you laugh and smile.” How does the music in *Five Guys Named Moe* match Jordan’s description of his work?
- Describe the elements of humor in one of the songs in *Five Guys Named Moe*.
- Many of the songs contain concise portrayals of human behavior that seem to be humorous, but actually describe human frailties or weaknesses. Describe the deeper meaning behind the surface hilarity of one of the songs in *Five Guys Named Moe*.
- Many of the stories include an element of pathos. What is pathos? Which songs do you think include a sense of pathos?
- Many of Louis Jordan’s songs are serious and funny at the same time. What is the basic connection between laughter and grief?
- Which songs in *Five Guys Named Moe* contain both serious and comic strains? Describe both elements in the song and explain how they work together. Can you think of a song by a contemporary pop artist that operates on both of these levels?
- One reviewer called Jordan’s style an example of the “yin–yang” of black America. What is the meaning of “yin–yang?” What do you think the reviewer meant when he described Jordan’s music in that way?
- Which songs in *Five Guys Named Moe* illustrate the idea that you can have a good time even though life is tough?

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- What does Jordan mean when he says “blues with a joke in it?” Investigate the historical link between the blues and humor.
- Write a story about a funny event in your life. Turn it into a song. Tell the story in a song form.
- Write a story that includes an element of pathos. Turn the story into a song.
- Write about a time in your life when you laughed in spite of being grief-stricken. If you have not had an experience of this kind, imagine one and write about it.

### The Songs in *Five Guys Named Moe*

#### Questions/Discussion Prompts

- Which of the songs are about broken hearts and breaking hearts?
- In what ways is “Let The Good Times Roll” a perfect example of a “jumping” rock song?
- Listen to the song “Life Is So Peculiar.” Explain what you think this lyric from the song means.

You know  
Life is so peculiar  
You get so wet in the rain  
You get so warm in the sunshine  
It doesn't pay to complain.

How is the message of this song consistent with Jordan's overall philosophy?

- What are the some of the reasons to stay single listed in “Safe, Sane and Single?”

- Describe what happened at the fish fry in “Saturday Night Fish Fry.” Why does the person telling the tale never want to hear a fish fry mentioned again?
- Describe the impact of alcohol abuse on the life of the individual telling the story of “What’s the Use of Getting Sober”.
- Who do you think was in the hen house in the song “Ain’t Nobody Here But Us Chickens?”
- “Beware, Brother, Beware” has been described as a precursor of rap music. Identify the pre-rap elements in the song. During the song, the Moes point out that men and women listen differently. What are the differences they describe? Have you ever known a woman who was a poor listener? A man who was a good listener?

#### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Compare “Beware, Brother, Beware,” a how-to guide for men that is a sassy, somewhat chauvinistic guide to feminine wiles and “Look Out, Sister,” which as its female counterpart dispenses an equal portion of skepticism for women. Make a list of points a man must beware of according to “Beware, Brother, Beware.” Make a similar list of points a woman should beware of according to “Look Out, Sister.”
- The lyric of the song “I Know What I’ve Got” suggests that it is sometimes safer to hold on to the present than to take a chance on an unknown. Write about a situation where you held on to something because “you knew what you had” instead of taking a chance. What were the results? What were the positive aspects and negative aspects of this course of action?
- What does the phrase “Azure Te” mean? What is the singer longing for in his life? In writing, describe a time when the presence of someone in a physical space made that place seem full and the lack of someone’s presence made a place seem empty. Describe an experience when you entered a space expecting it be “full” of someone and you discovered it empty.

- Who is the character that is heading for the station with a pack on his back in “Choo, Choo, Ch’Boogie?” What is his situation? Investigate the subculture of people who used to live and travel illegally on America’s railroads. Are there still people who do this? Why?
- Jordan used calypso as one of his modes of musical expression in songs like “Push Ka Pi Shi Pie.” Where does calypso music come from? Research the calypso music fad in this country in the ‘50s. Who were the main performers of calypso music? What were some of the calypso hits? What is “the limbo”?
- “If I Had Any Sense” is about a character who has too much pride to return home and admit his mistakes. Write about a situation when pride stood in your way.
- What is happening between the two characters in “Dad Gum Ya Hide Boy?” Write a story about deception between two friends.
- Write a scenario for the song “Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying.” Invent the characters and describe the series of events you think the song describes. What is the meaning of the phrase “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying?” Does it have a deeper meaning in the context of Louis Jordan’s philosophy of the blues?
- In the song “Early In The Morning,” Jordan writes about losing someone and trying to reclaim them by physically returning to places where good times were shared. Describe a time when you’ve experienced a sense of loss like this. What did you do to try to recapture a sense of the person you lost?
- Louis Jordan was a lyricist who rarely wrote in cliches when he created the words for his songs. What are cliches? How do they weaken a song? Find examples of sharp, funny images in Jordan’s songs—phrases that grab the listener and vividly describe a character, situation, or state of mind.

## Louis Jordan's Music and Storytelling

### Questions/Discussion Prompts

- Clarke Peters says that the line “We came out of nowhere but that don’t mean a thing” from the song *Five Guys Named Moe* sparked the idea of having the five Moes emerge from the radio. Can you find another idea in one of the lyrics in the show that could have triggered a very different way of presenting Jordan’s music on stage? Identify the lyric and describe the show that might have resulted from using it as a springboard.
- Louis Jordan had a lasting influence on pop music because while the be-bop combos of his day took jazz further towards featuring instrumentalists, he used instrumentation as a setting for a vocalist telling a story. Jordan’s songs tell complete stories in themselves in the form of a musical cartoon. Many are quick comedy dramas drawn from daily life and sketched in colorful language in a very compact way. Retell one of the stories told by a song in *Five Guys Named Moe*.

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Characters are at the heart of many of the songs in *Five Guys Named Moe*. Write a full description of a character you’ve met. What is a key characteristic of the individual? Describe that characteristic in two lines that rhyme with each other. Write a song about the character. Use your two-line rhyme as the repeated refrain of the song.
- Write a character sketch about an individual who is awake (as Nomax is) before anyone else early in the morning and is lost in thought. Take us inside these thoughts and describe the events and world he/she is envisioning.
- Since many of the songs in *Five Guys Named Moe* are thumbnail plays, try writing a short play with dialogue based on one of the scenarios in the songs. Act it out.

- Where in the songs do you find storytelling references to the black experience in America?
- Is there any kind of human experience you couldn't write a song about? Think of contemporary songs that you like that are examples of different kinds of human experiences.

## **The *Five Guys Named Moe***

### Questions/Discussion Prompts

- What are characteristics of each of the guys named Moe? (Big Moe, Four-Eyed Moe, No Moe and Little Moe.)
- What happens to the Five Guys at the end of *Five Guys Named Moe*? How does Nomax use the advice that the Moes have given him?

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Write a story about someone who appears out of your TV or other appliance to comment on some aspect of your life and possibly complicate it. What makes the character disappear?
- Look for works of literature where fantastic creatures appear to interfere with a character's life. How do the fantastic creatures in the story change the life of the main character?

## **The Music of Louis Jordan**

### Questions/Discussion Prompts

- Jordan believed that the jazz-men of the late '30s were too involved with "playing for themselves alone" and failed to involve their audiences sufficiently in their music. How did Jordan involve the audience in his music? How does he manipulate their emotions?
- It has been said that Louis Jordan's music and lyrics transcended the politics of his day. What do you think this statement means?

What do you think the connection between popular entertainers and political concerns should be?

- Listen to other songs written and/or performed by Louis Jordan such as “Boogie Woogie Blue Plate,” “But I’ll Be Back,” “Doug the Jitterbug,” “Fore Day Blues,” “Honey in the Bee Ball,” “I Know What You’re Puttin’ Down,” “Ice Man,” “Look Out,” “Ration Blues,” “Run Joe,” “You Ain’t Nowhere,” “You Will Always Have a Friend.” Describe the scenario of the songs you find. What kinds of moods do they convey? How do these songs differ from those in *Five Guys Named Moe*? Why do you think they weren’t included in *Five Guys Named Moe*?

#### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- The Tympany Five, the band Jordan put together in the early ‘40s, began when the big-band swing sound was king. Research the era of the big bands. What were some of the major swing bands? Describe their music.
- Louis Jordan is credited with having invented the “jump style” which paved the way to rock and roll. The Tympany Five was a jump band rather than a swing band. Investigate the terms “jump band,” “jump blues” and “shuffle boogie.” What kind music did a jump band play? How did the rhythm sections of a jump band differ from a swing band?
- The Tympany Five featured a lead singer (Louis Jordan) rather than instrumental solos as many swing bands did. Find an example of a swing band recording that features an instrumental soloist. Compare this to a recording of The Tympany Five.
- While swing bands played standard love songs, the Tympany Five performed novelty tunes instead. Find some recordings of novelty songs from the early ‘40s as recorded by Jordan’s band and other groups. What were some of the characteristics of the novelty song?
- Clarke Peters says that listening to Louis Jordan’s songs on the radio when he was growing up used to make him feel better. He

thought that the music could have that effect on other people. Do you think *Five Guys Named Moe* has that effect on its audiences?

## Louis Jordan's Musical Legacy

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Louis Jordan's influence on modern music ranged much farther and wider than his own fame; he has been called the unsung hero of rock and roll. His influence was seminal to the rhythm and blues musical explosion that followed Bill Haley. What is rhythm and blues? Trace its history.
- Jordan influenced the music of the following musicians: Chuck Berry, Little Joe Blue, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Dusty Brown, Ray Charles, Bo Diddley, Floyd Dixon, Fats Domino, Wynonie Harris, Jay Hawkins, Freddy King, Little Milton, James Brown, Junior Walker and Elvis Presley. Listen to the work of one or more of these artists. Discuss the elements of their music that you believe Jordan might have influenced.
- To better understand how Jordan influenced the music of others, listen to some of the songs written by the team of Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller for The Coasters and compare them to songs written by Louis Jordan (i.e. "Messie Bessie" and "I Like 'Em Fat Like That").
- Clarke Peters, the creator of *Five Guys Named Moe*, has said "cats like Louis Jordan were already coming to the end of their careers by the early '50s. Even though they were the main influence for a lot of what came after them, they were being pushed to the back of the shelf by the rock and pop people." Explore the fact that individuals who create popular music trends often have short-lived careers. What are some of the reasons for this phenomenon?
- Name some artists whose careers have endured for many decades. Why do you think they managed to hold the spotlight for so long? Write an essay about the fact that we consider our artists "disposable" in contemporary America. What does this say about our society?

## **Louis Jordan and the Instruments of Jazz**

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Louis Jordan was a saxophone player. Research some of the other great jazz saxophone players (such as Sidney Bechet, Johnny Hodges, Don Redman, Charlie Barnet, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and David Sanborn). Find recordings of their work.
- Trace the history of the saxophone. When did it become important in jazz?
- Describe the different types of saxophones (alto, tenor, soprano and baritone).
- What are the other instruments that Louis Jordan used in presenting his music? Trace the evolution of the instruments used in jazz. What instruments are commonly used by contemporary jazz combos?

## **The World in Which Louis Jordan Wrote His Music**

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Louis Jordan was a very successful artist in the '40s and 50's; he attributed his success to the fact that he did everything — meaning he created all kinds of music from blues to pop. He said "I played just as many white places as colored places." Investigate segregation in the music industry during the '40s and '50s.
- During the height of his recording success, Jordan would do 40 or 50 one-nighters in a row in the South. Investigate what touring was like for a group like Louis Jordan's during that time period. How did the band travel? What were some of the problems of the touring life?
- Who listened to Louis Jordan's music?
- What other kinds of music were Americans listening to during the years Louis Jordan's music was popular?

- What was happening in other art forms—theatre, dance, visual arts, film and broadcasting?
- Make a chronology of events that happened during the peak years of Jordan’s career. Does the nature of these events help to explain the popularity of his music?

## The Role of Music in Your Life

### Questions/Discussion Prompts

1. When he is feeling blue, Nomax, the leading character in *Five Guys Named Moe*, chooses to spend his evening at home alone listening to the radio. Have you ever used the radio in this fashion? Why? What impact did listening to the radio have on your feelings?
- How else do you use radio in your life? What do you listen to besides music?
  - Can you think of reasons why radio can be more powerful than television?
  - How do you choose the music you listen to on the radio? Do you vary what you listen to on the radio? How often? Why?
  - Why does some music mean one thing to you at certain times and then mean other things at other times? Describe a situation when a recent event in your life influenced the way you heard a piece of music.

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Write about the meaning of music in your life.
- Some of the songs sung by the *Five Guys Named Moe* echo Nomax’s emotions. Write about the ways that popular pieces of music have echoed your emotions at various times in your life.
- Write about the ways in which music has had a role in shaping your

emotions and/or changed the way you feel about something in your own life.

- Write about the way that music has helped to shape your dreams for the future. How has it influenced your feelings about love? Your feelings about social issues?
- Talk to your parents and/or grandparents about their radio listening habits when they were your age. Did they listen to music? What kind of music did they enjoy listening to on the radio? How else did they listen to music?

## **The Roots of Rhythm and Blues**

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- Find blues songs during any period between Reconstruction and the present day that speak of aspects of the human experience such as birth and death, love and hate, hope and despair, or laughter and suffering.
- Find examples of early work-and-holler songs and spirituals. Listen for roots of rhythm and blues in these songs.
- Listen to West African music and observe how it related to American rhythm and blues music.
- What does it mean to say that folk music and life are integrated in the West African culture from which the slaves came? Are music and life integrated in American culture? Why? Why not?
- What were some of the circumstances and conditions that freed slaves faced during Reconstruction that gave rise to the blues?
- Imagine you are a freed slave who has been dreaming of freedom and a new life for years. You are free but your life is still impossibly restricted, with barriers everywhere. Write an essay on your feelings. Turn the feelings in your essay into a poem or song lyric.

- What do contemporary forms of music like rap and hip-hop have in common with the blues?
- Listen to Billie Holliday's song "Strange Fruit." She is singing about the lynching of a southern black man but is really outraged by the fact that a white hospital let her father die by rejecting him. This song is an excellent example of a blues tradition of hiding protests about unjust situations behind a metaphor. Write a poem or song lyric that appears to be about one thing but is really about something else. How can you make what you are really referring to obvious to the reader or listener?
- Research and write about some of the major figures in blues history such as W.C. Handy, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith.

## Plan Your Own Musical

### Assignments/Research and Writing Prompts

- By shaping the songs of Louis Jordan into a theatre format, creator Clarke Peters rescued a neglected musical pioneer from relative obscurity. Explore the music of the '30s, '40s and '50s and look for another figure who deserves to be re-examined and newly appreciated in this way. Defend your choice. Make a list of the songs you would include in your musical tribute to this musical figure. Create an idea for a show like *Five Guys Named Moe* which is built around these songs. You can use any concept you choose and any type and size of cast. Explain your choices. Your goal should be to make this music live as the creators of *Five Guys Named Moe* made Jordan's music live decades after it was first heard.
- Now pick a contemporary artist whose music you like. Make a list of their songs. Create an idea for a show like *Five Guys Named Moe* which is built around these songs. You can use any concept you choose and any type and size of cast. Explain your choices.

## Critical Analysis

### Assignment/Writing Prompt

Write a review of a performance of *Five Guys Named Moe*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review:

- Did *Five Guys Named Moe* hold your interest? Why?
- Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience.
- What was the structure of the show? Was there a single story or multiple stories? How did the multiple stories connect? Was anything about the story unexpected? How?
- Describe the way the music and lyrics worked in the show.
- Describe the sets, costumes, lighting and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add to the meaning of the show?
- Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
- Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.

## Appendix

The following background material on the creators of *Five Guys Named Moe*, Louis Jordan, the history of the blues and resource lists are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

## The Creators of *Five Guys Named Moe*

CLARKE PETERS – (Author) Clark Peters began his career in England in 1976 in *I Gotta Shoe*, a short musical by Ned Sherrin of the television series “That Was The Week That Was.” He played the role of Jim in the British cast of *Bubbling Brown Sugar* and Sky Masterson in the Royal National Theatre’s production of *Guys and Dolls*. He has also appeared in British productions of *One Mo’ Time*, *Carmen Jones*, *Amen Corner*, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* and *Driving Miss Daisy*. He played Four-Eyed Moe in the original production of *Five Guys Named Moe*, for which he received the Olivier Award. He directed the West End production of *King*, the opera based on the life of Martin Luther King, *Blues for Mr. Charlie* and the original *Five Guys Named Moe* for the Royal National Theatre.

CAMERON MACKINTOSH – (Producer) has presented over 300 productions around the world including *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *Five Guys Named Moe* and *Carousel*. He has recently presented Julie Andrews in the American premiere of Stephen Sondheim’s *Putting It Together* in New York. Other shows in preparation in London include a major revival of *Oliver!* starring Jonathan Pryce opening at The London Palladium in November and a summer revival of Arnold Bennett’s *The Card* to be presented in Regent’s Park. In 1995 he plans to bring the smash hit musical staging of the Who’s *Tommy* to London and he will produce the next Boubil and Schönberg musical *Martin Guerre*. He is currently working on an animated film musical version of Kipling’s *Just So Stories* with Steven Spielberg.

## The Development of *Five Guys Named Moe*

The idea for *Five Guys Named Moe* grew out of a cabaret number that was first performed at Sheffield’s Crucible five years before the show opened in London. The enthusiastic response given the material encouraged the show’s creator, Clarke Peters, to begin researching Louis Jordan’s music and life.

As he reviewed Jordan’s catalogue of hits, he realized that the songs were inherently theatrical because they often told complete stories in themselves. Peters decided to focus on creating a theatre piece that combined Jordan’s music, audience participation, actor’s improvisation and pure entertainment.

He first presented a prototype of his concept on the set of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, in which he was appearing at the National Theatre. The first full production was mounted at The Theatre Royal Stratford East in London, where it was warmly received by the audience and discovered by producer Cameron Mackintosh.

Mr. Mackintosh moved it to the West End in December 1990. It opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre in April 1992.

## About Louis Jordan

Originally limited to rhythm and blues circles, Louis Jordan (1908–1975) broke into the front lines of show business through a unique combination of visual showmanship, good musicianship, a strong accent on humor and an original rhythmic vocal style. He is best remembered as the clean-cut, swinging leader of an R&B-based jazz combo which achieved considerable popularity throughout most of the '40s playing before large audiences and selling impressive quantities of records.

Jordan was a major force in revolutionizing post-war jump and boogie music to mid-'50s rhythm and blues. No black singer-instrumentalist was more successful in bringing the tough excitement of R&B into the public consciousness. He transformed music by showing how a big band could be pared down to a small-combo blues sound without losing power, established his style as a cornerstone of rhythm and blues and set the scene for rock and roll. Although his personal style was strongly rooted in blues and jazz, it also included elements of boogie-woogie, jump, calypso, rumbas and ballads.

He played swinging alto-sax and sang in a blues-influenced style. His playing and singing, as well as the music produced by his combo, reflected his appealing sense of humor and immense vitality.

Jordan was born in Brinkley, Arkansas, on July 8, 1908. After studying music with his father from the age of 7, he attended Arkansas Baptist

College in Little Rock and worked as a ball player. He began his career as a performer during school vacations touring with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels as a band member and dancer. In the late 20's, he toured with the Ma Rainey Show working the TOBA circuit through Mississippi. He began his professional career in 1929 with Jimmy Pryor's Imperial Serenaders and worked with various bands between 1930 and 1936, when he joined Chick Webb's orchestra in New York City.

He first became prominent when working with Webb as an alto sax player and vocalist between 1936 and 1938. In 1938, he began his solo career. He formed his own group, The Tympany Five and started to carve out his image as a showman, comic, entertainer and leader. After playing at the Elks Rendezvous at 134th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem for two years, the Tympany Five began recording for Decca in 1939. The group's repertoire included mostly blues, R&B, jazz, novelty items from polkas to rumbas and pop music of the day. For millions of fans, the Jordan sound proved hard to resist.

During his time with Decca, Jordan produced over two hundred sides, many of which made the charts. The combo played tight arrangements in shuffle boogie rhythm. During this period, Jordan featured himself more and more in vocal blues and novelties. He could croon and scat and specialized in satirical lyrics that addressed the problems of being black. He was known for the brilliance of his vocal performances and his comic asides.

Between 1943 and 1951, Jordan had 55 singles on the top 10 on the rhythm and blues chart.

Jordan's major hits were "Knock Me A Kiss," "Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town," both recorded in 1941; "Five Guys Named Moe," in 1942; and "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie," which sold a million records, in 1946. As a composer, he reached his apex with the immortal "Is You Is or Is You Ain't Ma' Baby?" Other important recordings included "Caldonia " and "My Baby Said Yes" (with Bing Crosby) in 1945, "G.I. Jive" in 1946, "Open the Door Richard" in 1947 and "Baby It's Cold Outside" (with Ella Fitzgerald) and "Saturday Night Fish Fry" in 1949. He also recorded with Louis Armstrong in 1950.

Jordan's band appeared in the films *Follow The Boys* and *Meet Miss Bobby Socks* (1944) and *Swing Parade* (1946). They starred in 1946 in the all-black movie musical *Beware*. Jordan was also featured in the 1949 film *Shout, Sister, Shout*.

He left Decca with the rise of Bill Haley when "Rock Around the Clock" heralded the pop beginnings of rock and roll.

Jordan organized a big band for a tour in the fall of 1951, but usually played with a small group. In the early '50s, he was intermittently inactive due to illness and confined himself to his Arizona home. However, he made a comeback in the mid-'50s. He signed with Eddie Messner's Aladdin label for two years before joining Mercury in 1956. In 1961 he signed with Marty Craft's Warwick Records after which he moved on to Ray Charles' Tangerine label in the mid-'60s. In 1968 Jordan formed his own label, the Los Angeles-based Pzazz company. He performed as a single in the early 60's before reorganizing his combo and touring Europe and Asia in the '60s.

In 1974, he recorded "Great Rhythm And Blues Oldies, Volume 1", a testimony to how appealing and vital Louis Jordan and his music remained until the end of his successful and flamboyant career. He died in Los Angeles of a heart attack in February, 1975. He is buried in Mt. Olive Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri.

Ironically, Jordan's work was made *passé* by the rock and roll revolution he made possible; with the creation of *Five Guys Named Moe* his work is again receiving the recognition it deserves.

## **The Musical/Historical Roots of Rhythm and Blues**

### **The Blues Tradition**

The words, rhythms and emotional power of the blues tradition has deeply influenced much of American popular music, including the music of Louis Jordan.

From Reconstruction until the '50s, writing, singing and playing the blues were among the few ways in which black Americans could express their true feelings. The blues were combined with spirituals to form gospel music, which in turn influenced rhythm and blues and soul. Blues and jazz are the basis of the pounding up-tempo sounds with strong lyrics that are the basis for rhythm and blues. When joined with country music, rhythm and blues evolved into rock and roll, funk and disco.

The term "the blues" is derived from the word "blue" which had been used to describe misery and dejection for many centuries. It was first used to describe black folk music at the end of the 19th century. "The blues," which grew out of black poverty and degradation, often express the longing for both freedom and satisfying personal relationships. For example, the conflicts between the sexes in many of Louis Jordan's songs are often also symbols of the frustration caused by limits placed by whites on blacks.

The roots of the blues go back through the American slave experience to African musical traditions. When the slaves were exposed to European music, the two traditions became intertwined, with the African characteristics dominating. West African music, which is extremely complex and sophisticated, was the source of the work songs and hollers used by American slaves; it was also the primary influence on the form which we call "the blues."

The blues drew heavily on spirituals, many of which can be traced back to the spirituals and songs of Ghana, Dahomey and Nigeria. The joining of everyday life and music in Africa was so complete that music served as an essential means of expressing feelings and concerns. Music was a basic part of individual and community life, not something added to it. Messages were sent by music both to distant tribes and for day-to-day communication. The words themselves were a form of music and could not be separated from the sound.

When the slaves were brought to America, they continued to accom-

pany their daily activities with music and to use music to reveal their feelings and concerns.

The blues evolved in different regions of the South during the years that followed the end of the Civil War as white Southerners replaced slavery with new forms of deprivation for the freed slaves. While slavery had produced a group culture that encouraged communal singing, the share-cropping system placed the freed slaves in relative isolation and a more solitary form of music—expressing the need for relief from personal pain—resulted. Early blues singers accompanied themselves on a variety of instruments from violins to banjos to a type of kazoo. In the 1880's, the guitar was adopted as the primary accompaniment of the blues.

Blues can be hollered, shouted, cried, or crooned. True blues singers sing in their full natural voices to get the blues out of their system and off their minds. The blues were sung to ease burdens by pouring out some of the misery, finding the humor in it and transforming it into something moving and positive. The blues pushed people into defying despair, into hoping and seeking for better things.

The blues are a migratory form of music and were carried by men roaming from town to town and from job to job. W.C. Handy was a blues writer who popularized the country blues that he heard Southern black men singing on the cotton, sugar and rice plantations. The blues continued to be spread by singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith in the medicine shows, theatres and entertainment halls of the South. Ma Rainey served as a link between the male country blues singers of the South and the classic female blues singers. She sang of loneliness, violence and trouble, and loved using field hollers and spirituals.

“Crazy Blues,” sung by Mamie Smith and released in 1920, was the first vocal blues record and sold over 100,000 copies in a month. This proof of the existence of a blues market was a crucial development in the influence of the blues. Records and radio stations made the blues available to millions who had no idea that this form of black expression existed. The real birth of recorded blues music came with Bessie Smith’s recording of “Downhearted Blues” in 1923.

The “urban blues” movement, of which Louis Jordan was a part, developed in the ‘20s outside the mainstream traditions created by classic blues singers. Like the original country blues, urban blues were performed in mundane surroundings by black migrants to Northern cities and were part of their everyday lives. The difficult realities of urban life produced a blues that was harder and even more hopeless than earlier forms. Styles varied greatly from town to town, but all urban blues were rooted in the rawness and poverty of big city life.

The piano became an increasingly important element in the blues during the 20’s and 30’s. Boogie–woogie piano blues became the rage in Chicago and rapidly spread to the Southwest. Boogie or rolling piano blues originated in western Louisiana and the logging camps of Texas at the end of the 19th century. At the same time, stride piano was the rage in Harlem.

Between the ‘20s and the ‘30s, the blues became an important aspect of the music produced by touring “territory bands.” Some of the most important developments in the blues, jazz and American music as a whole took place in the wide open spaces of Texas and the territories. The originators of modern or urban blues and its commercial off–shoots (rhythm and blues, and rock and roll) were all territory men. By the ‘30, Count Basie had his own band, a Kansas–based touring ensemble with incredible musical power and a strong blues line. While the jazz that developed in New York and the Northeast was more heavily influenced by ragtime, jazz in Harlem in the ‘30’s and ‘40’s was continually exposed to the blues.

During the ‘20s, blues–based ballads were heard on radios and phonographs and blues–based dances like the foxtrot increased their popularity with the mass audience. Irving Berlin was the first composer of popular tunes to seize on the potential of jazz and blues. During World War I, he was writing various blues–based pop songs. As other songwriters such as Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Sigmund Romberg and George Gershwin followed his lead, softened versions of the blues became a national craze.

The blues changed as America entered the Depression and became more bitter and despairing than ever before. In the late '30s, screaming blues singers in Kansas, like Joe Turner, inspired rhythm and blues (R&B) in its earliest form as they sang in front of huge rhythm units. The outstanding blues singers of this period developed a “shouting” style and began using jazz phrasing, placing their lyrics behind the beat or in front of it instead of right next to it.

After World War II, the jumping, small group music of the urban blues groups and driving, swinging jazz of the big combinations were joined in the further development of rhythm and blues. In the R&B bands, the guitars, basses and even the harmonicas were electrified or amplified. Forceful music with a positive sensibility served as a background for strong-voiced blues shouters.

During this period, a form of the blues called “bar blues” appeared, which characteristically had a heavy, irregular rhythm and a boastful style. These bar blues were combined with the raw power of the delta blues to give R&B music its energy and strength.

During World War II, the expectations of black Americans had been raised during a conflict ostensibly concerned with fighting racism and protecting democratic principles. Inevitable frustration resulted from their realization that nothing was going to change for them in the United States after the war. The shouting blues style clearly stated that continued oppression was not going to be accepted.

Among the most successful of the rhythm and blues singers who performed against raunchy, riveting big band sounds in the late 40's and early 50's were Wyonie Harris, Joe Turner, Percy Mayfield, Roy Brown, T-Bone Walker and Louis Jordan. Many of these performers had records that sold more than a million copies almost entirely to black listeners — a market that came to be known as rhythm and blues.

The bands that these men traveled with were usually dominated by tenor saxophone, electric guitar, string bass, piano, drums and occasionally a trumpet or trombone. The use of a tenor sax or electric gui-

tar served as a responding “voice.” The continued use of a string bass and the absence of trumpets and brass defined the music of these bands and set the stage for Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Bill Haley, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry and other rock-and-rollers of the ‘50s.

Louis Jordan was one of the most influential of the blues-men of his era. He helped shape contemporary urban blues styles in a number of ways. While many of his peers—who also began as jazz musicians—went on to reshape jazz during the bebop revolution, Jordan elected to remain an entertainer. He chose to continue “playing his blues and swinging,” satisfying his audience, rather than playing to please himself. His “jump” band, the Tympany Five, backed up his skillfully paced mix of humorous patter, powerful saxophone solos and sly, witty blues lyrics. Among his major accomplishments were expanding his audience to include a substantial number of white fans, establishing the saxophone as an essential part of the blues ensemble, pioneering the use of the electric organ and setting high professional standards.

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