



New World Records

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Steppin' On the Gas: Rags To Jazz 1913-1927

New World NW 269

People crave novelty, excitement, beauty, and a feeling of wholeness. Three generations of Americans of various ethnic backgrounds and social classes have found these in the syncopated music of ragtime and jazz, often in preference to concert music. Ragtime and jazz were both a part of the popular dance and entertainment music of the United States and separate from it. They used many of the same conventions of musical vocabulary and form as popular music and were symbiotic with the vocal and dance styles of an age. But in exploring musical vocabulary and form, and in striving after artistic control and imagination beyond the requirements of a functional music, they transcended the limits we usually set to popular music and have proved durable in a way that most commercial, fashionable music is not. These two musics have exploded the three traditional pigeonholes of folk, popular, and art music; all three categories apply. This may be due largely to the preponderant role of black Americans in the creation and dissemination of the music; for them the three traditional categories do not hold and the cultural heritage of concert music is doubly distant.

Part of the American drama is the working out of frictions and conflicts in a socially, ethnically, and economically fragmented population. This can be seen in music and the theater arts, where the United States has for a long time depended on minorities to provide its diversion and therapy. Socially, ragtime and jazz are a metaphor of cultural synthesis in the guise of art. Their history is marked by repeated episodes in which black and white American musicians have bridged and blended—by no means always consciously or intentionally—their separate musics.

The present collection of performances

recorded between 1913 and 1927 illuminates part of the early history of these long-term musical and cultural processes. (New World Records NW 235, *Maple Leaf Rag*, and NW 260, *Shuffle Along*, document other phases.) To a certain extent it can be seen as an anthology of early jazz, or "pre-jazz," though such a view violates the meaning of many of the examples in their own time, when neither the word "jazz" nor the phenomenon was clearly defined.

Part of the difficulty is that we have neither name nor aural image of the music between around 1910 and 1920 that is no longer ragtime but not yet jazz. The general understanding of the sequence of musical events is roughly this: After a formative period of undetermined length in the nineteenth century, ragtime swept over the United States in a number of forms during the last five years of the century. Although its most authentic, pure, and artistic form is held to be the piano rags of black composers such as the belatedly famous Scott Joplin, it was played by every type of ensemble in American popular music. It provided the music for the one-step, and could be adapted to words and sung (see *Classic Songs and Ragtime*, Smithsonian Collection N-001). After 1910 ragtime and ragtime dances alike began to bore and were swamped by a wave of new dances, some imported, some home-grown: tango, maxixe, hesitation waltz, half-and-half, and walks and trots of all sorts that eventually coalesced in the fox trot. During the same period a number of black dances, such as the shimmy and the slow drag, started to spread to the United States at large (see Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, New York: Macmillan, 1968), as did a new kind of music generically called blues. It is

apparently during this time that the word "jazz" began to appear in newspapers and magazines and in the names of musical groups. The word was used for music that was fast, wild, and exaggeratedly syncopated, not to designate any clearly defined musical style. It is even possible that it meant something like "corny" (to use a more modern term) or satirically rustic. All these terms apply to the first jazz group to be recorded: the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a New Orleans quintet whose performances of 1917 were recorded by three major companies, Victor, Aeolian, and Columbia.

A great many jazz critics and musicians view this fact of history as a perverse accident and begin the history of jazz proper in 1923, when a number of highly gifted black musicians began to record in Chicago, mostly for black listeners. But it is not so long ago that even these recordings were heard as primitive and archaic and that the real history of jazz was felt to begin in early 1925 with the era of electrical recording and the climactic performances of young Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers, and the big bands of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington. History can be tailored to suit many tastes; what matters here is that the period from the decline of ragtime to the beginnings of "real" jazz has been in critical limbo, a kind of musical Dark Ages in miniature.

Another face of the problem is the tendency in writing on jazz to equate the word with "good" jazz, so that we are unwilling to use it as stylistically descriptive in an objective way. Even critics of the broadest taste idealistically oppose jazz or "real" jazz to artistically "lower" commercial or popular music. While giving due honor to those who establish and uphold standards, we are not given much help by them in understanding the decade 1913-22. Neither do histories of popular song come to our rescue, intent as they are on the songwriter or his market, the mass audience.

Another stumbling block all along has been hero worship. So long as the meaning of jazz is summed up in the great soloists who came forward after 1928 (NW 274, *Jive at Five*), we shall have trouble understanding the music that came before, in which soloists practically never dominate (for an exception, see Johnny Dunn, below), at least in recordings, the only concrete evidence remaining to us of the practice of the time. So our focus must be on the ensemble to perceive what constituted the style as well as its excellences. On the rare occasions before 1925 when a brilliant soloist in the modern mold makes himself known

to us (listen to Sidney Bechet in the 1923 "Old Fashioned Love" in this collection), we see in the most direct way the difference between a collective, ensemble-based style and the new jazz of the middle twenties.

Another approach to understanding the difference is to listen to the relatively large number of cornet players whose basic rhythmic approach and solo concept were formed before Louis Armstrong. The present collection abounds in the work of such men: Cricket Smith, Mutt Carey, Johnny Dunn, Thomas Morris, Paul Mares, Peter Bocage, and Freddie Keppard. Available elsewhere are the indispensable Joe Oliver (*King Oliver's Jazz Band 1923*, Smithsonian Collection R 001) and others, such as Nenny Coycault, Tommy Ladnier, Phil Napoleon, and Nick LaRocca. Their playing is crisp and raggy, syncopated but always returning to the pulse, and precisely subdivides the beat in two or four at fast tempos. It does not swing (constantly float before, after, or between the beats); or when it does, it does so in slower tempos and in playing modeled on vocal blues. These masterful performers play variations on the tune, not on chord progressions, except in short breaks or in stop-time choruses conceived as a string of breaks. All players, even those identifiable as hotter or jazzier, used a number of rhythmic mannerisms: reversed dotted rhythms (sixteenth note followed by eighth), double-timing, and so forth. These mannerisms passed rapidly out of fashion in the twenties to surface in parodies of old-fashioned and corny playing, even to this day.

Such a fundamental change in rhythmic concept has a special meaning in jazz history but is also part of a large-scale change in American popular music, both vocal and instrumental. The shift from one-step to fox trot as the basic social-dance type involved a radical slowing down of the accompanying music. (Actually, the half-note pulse of rags and one-steps was moderate enough, but the smallest note values—often part of the melodies—went by at a breakneck clip of 450-500 a minute.) It also may be that there had been a constant tendency to ever more rapid execution during the first decade of the century, which may have occasioned the well-known caveats of some piano-rag composers not to play their music too fast. The contrast is well illustrated here by the Jim Europe performances, recorded several years apart. Fast, wild dancing did not disappear in the twenties, of course, but new dance types (most notoriously the Charleston, whose characteristic rhythms stamp "I Ain't Gonna Play No Second

Fiddle," reissued here) arose to fill the need.

There was an equally drastic change in the character of the melodies used for dance music. Much of the older dance music was written as such and conceived for instruments, not voices. Along with slower tempos at the end of the teens, we begin to hear a lot of tunes in long note values, with lyrics; a special instance was the increasingly important vocal blues. The effect of this change was twofold: the long melody notes presented a harmonic challenge, and there were drastically bigger holes between the phrases for a player to fill.

Also obvious in the years after World War I was a shift from tunes with many articulated sections (several strains differing in character and often in key, along with introductions, modulations, transitions, interludes, codas) to the verse-chorus format, with the verse often disappearing in instrumental performance. The older pieces were routines that had to be played as such; the newer ones were repetitions of a chord progression that cried out for elaboration and enlivening through ingenious arrangement or solo extemporization. (It seems that not all musicians were up to the routines in the heyday of the multi-strain tune. Pops Foster [see Bibliography] speaks eloquently of the inability of the "chorus men" of the teens to master them.) When individual inspiration enters the older kind of instrumental music, it is mostly in the artful, elegant, and forceful statement of the tune or in the brief solo break.

In the older dance music, much of what we would call arrangement was written into the tune. There is comparatively little variation in texture, apart from conventions concerning such things as trio strains and dynamic changes to make repetitions of a section more interesting. I assume that in most dance bands of the first decade of the century the violin still held the lead, doubled by cornet. Flute or clarinet, sometimes both, might be used, sometimes for melody but more often for decorative ornament. The bass part could be played by string bass or cello, doubled by trombone in a large band. Guitars, mandolins, or banjos might be included, not only for their percussive contribution but as melody instruments doubling or playing around the lead. Drums followed the turns of the lead carefully but were not a separate force. Much dance music was also played by brass or mixed brass-and-woodwind bands.

In the course of a few years flute, mandolin, and guitar were phased out, and the saxophone became a doubling instrument for fiddle and clarinet players. By the early twenties many dance

bands consisted of a pair of brass and a pair of reeds: cornet, trombone, and two saxes. This gave the possibility of playing one duet against the other, and the possibilities were even richer with a second cornet, allowing complete harmonies in the brass as well as taking some of the burden from the other cornetist. With one trio in the brass, it was only logical to have another in the reeds, an instrumentation that dominated the twenties and early thirties. To balance these forces, it was almost necessary to have a strong, independent rhythm section, given special character by a brass bass (incidentally releasing the trombone from playing the simplest bass line), chording banjo, and very busy piano playing and drumming. Bands that played elegant hotels still carried strings for polite music, as well as larger reed sections.

But cabarets, cheaper and tougher dance halls, and saloons had other requirements. These were met by a variety of smaller-band types, particularly the five- or six-piece group represented here by bands led by Kid Ory and Clarence Williams: trumpet or cornet, trombone, clarinet or soprano saxophone, piano, and banjo or drums (or both). Such a group could also be effective as a novelty vaudeville act or as a featured cabaret or restaurant attraction, a role notably played by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, though before taking New York and London by storm it had paid its saloon dues. Jazz historians usually think of such groups as miniature marching bands; though much of the early recorded repertory as well as the frequency of street music in New Orleans supports this, the bands can also be heard as hardier varieties of the more genteel violin-led groups, with trombone rather than string bass. The rougher the environment, the raunchier and bluer the music, and the small bands developed a way of playing blues that had little to do with marching but much with rough and dirty dancing, though their playing was somewhat moderated by the dignified model of the vocal blues of the first great recorded singers, Ma Rainey and the several Smiths.

Despite the revisions of recent jazz history (for example, the serious attention paid to the "territory bands" of Kansas City and the Southwest; NW 217, *Jammin' for the Jackpot*, and NW 256, *Sweet and Low Blues*), the myth of the New Orleans origin of jazz remains strong, based on a rich web of memories reinforced by a small but artistically very successful group of recordings made by New Orleans musicians in the 1920s. To briefly state the essentials of that myth: Jazz was born in New Orleans through a fusion of Afro-American,

Caribbean, European, and urban and country styles. There the environment was especially favorable in its social structure, in which the various black and white subcultures were able to cross in complex ways, and in its mixture of musical functions—a lot of outdoor music for funerals, fish fries, parades, advertising and the like, and indoor music for a particularly concentrated and active red-light district. With the enforced closing of the district, New Orleans cabaret music went to Chicago and became in its hybridized or evolved forms there and in New York a national and eventually an international music.

It has gradually come to be recognized that a great many important jazz figures of the twenties did not come from New Orleans or the Deep South, that as much as they may have admired New Orleans music, they had a different musical background. If such musicians seemed to lack anything, it was a musically rich and satisfying manner of ensemble performance, although on this point there is some disagreement, as in the critics' views of the 1923 recordings by Bennie Moten's Kansas City band.

Another major revision in jazz history recognizes that there was nothing sacrosanct about the particular instrumentation of the earliest supposedly "authentic" New Orleans bands to record, that neither written music nor the saxophone nor the eight- to ten-piece dance band that might use both was to be viewed as a sign of musical decadence or of dilution of the "real jazz." Some of A. J. Piron's recordings are as much New Orleans music as those of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. To have moved with the times (as did Jimmy Noone, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Luis Russell, Jelly Roll Morton, and many others) is no longer automatically seen as musical apostasy.

Since one of the major contrasts illustrated by this anthology is that between New Orleans and New York, I should include a few words in support of the aural evidence. New Orleans music is slower and more relaxed, due not so much to the fragrant breezes of the Mississippi delta as to the lesser impact of fast ragtime and one-step playing, the longer lives of some of the older dances (quadrilles, lancers, medium-tempo waltzes), and the greater influence of vocal blues and slow dancing of the rougher sort than in New York. Another feature contributing to an impression of greater smoothness is a certain elegance and restraint in New Orleans clarinet playing, at a time when the instrument elsewhere was often played to exploit its rube and barnyard potential. And there was sure-

ly some moderating effect on the band sound from the early New Orleans predilection for string bass, particularly bowed, instead of the elephantine brass bass that dominated the twenties.

Also deserving notice is the greater simplicity, or at least less obviously commercial, fashionable character, of the melodic material in many earlier New Orleans performances. This can be heard in the middle of a relatively complicated piece (as in "She's Cryin' for Me") or may involve an entire performance (as in Piron's "West Indies Blues," an exceptionally repetitive and naïve tune). This folksiness is not so much New Orleanian as southern, a mark of distance, I think, from New York.

We hear New York bands as assemblages of often very different musical personalities; we hear New Orleans bands, black or white, as units. This difference was perceived by the Chicago musician whose words were found by Frederic Ramsey, Jr., in the *Ragtime Review* of March, 1917 (the writer is commenting on contrasts between black and white rag musicians as well as between black and white New Orleanians):

Some of the best business musicians of the white race are at a loss to understand why there is such a vast difference in the way they play rag numbers and the way their colored brother plays the same rag. The secret is that one plays the music note for note and in a mechanical manner, while the other will improvise at times and be governed by his own ideas as to his style of playing. He will almost unconsciously pay as much, if not more, attention to the musicians surrounding him that he does the music. The result is that by each man following this method they soon learn to quickly grasp the other fellow's rhythm.

It may be that this grasping of the other fellow's rhythm in New Orleans originated in large part in the high degree of solidarity in the musical community there (ponderously but thoroughly explained in Danny Barker and Jack Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*, 1973), both black and white. Ultimately, the concept of community was transformed from a geographical trait to a jazz way of life in the course of the twenties, creating nationwide bonds of musical and cultural sympathy in a relatively small group of musicians and aficionados (NW 250, *Little Club Jazz*).

Apart from its effect on a relatively few musicians, record collectors in eastern colleges, and adventurous cabaretgoers in the largest cities, it is difficult to gauge the impact that the jazz closest to a black urban folk music made on the general

public between World War I and the Depression. One suspects that the impact was indirect, uneven, and much dependent on geography—despite the increasing importance of radio. Much of the commercial music of the late twenties was distinctly jazzy, the way it had been raggy fifteen or twenty years earlier, and perhaps "fast" and peppy before that.

The core meaning of jazz, then as now, depended not on novelty, precise execution, or a therapeutic bounce (many dance bands of the twenties, such as the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks, had those things under full control) but on richness of texture, rhythmic impulse and flow, and inventive and daring expressiveness, all working together. Such qualities demanded not virtuosity as such but a union of technique with emotional intensity, which white musicians had some difficulty attaining. For them there was very frequently interference or competition from the European "classical" tradition, as well as the loss of social status in becoming musicians, especially jazz musicians, in the first place.

This union of technique and emotion makes the difference between performances that can still be heard as beautiful and those of historical interest only. Some of the records included here are, to my ears, in the latter category: the performances by the Six Brown Brothers and by the 1919 Europe military band, and the first by Johnny Dunn. They all come from a time when it must have been difficult to be a serious popular musician: too much else was changing. Fortunately, the socially based coherence of the New Orleans vernacular instrumental style kept the flame burning until things sorted themselves out, until the rest of the nation found a way to play its own jazz (a struggle witnessed in the East, for example, by the rather awkward and prolonged birth pangs of Duke Ellington's band).

By the time of the later recordings in this collection, jazz was coming to be a world force. Many records were issued by European subsidiaries of American companies, and many European popular musicians were beginning to play their version of American music. This is only a later chapter in the history of American music and musicians in Europe, as ragtime had also been exported in various ways. One thing was new: the writing of jazz-influenced pieces by European art composers like Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Milhaud and by their American counterparts like Gershwin and Copland (the American composers, ironically, were almost as distant from the jazz of their day as any European). Often, however, it seems that the influ-

ence was not jazz as it is conceived today, or the best jazz of the early twenties, but earlier American popular music, particularly as embodied in "novelty" melodic or instrumental effects. These represented no important alternative or addition to the concert composer's traditional arsenal. How could one have transferred to the traditional concert stage the ensemble coherence and organic sound vocabulary of the best of the performances brought together here without destroying their improvisational basis?

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No single record can adequately cover the diversity of instrumental styles that a careful ear can hear in the music before 1923. Major omissions here are the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (including some of their quieter performances, not readily accessible on reissues), the Memphis Five, and other white groups. Two black New York musicians, Ford Dabney and Tim Brymm, made early recordings that are unfortunately not available. This gap is remedied somewhat by various recent recordings of Eubie Blake (for instance NW 260, *Shuffle Along*, which also includes some ludicrous accompanying by a band conducted by Brymm). There are many popular dance or novelty bands recorded between 1917 and 1923 that would put the performances included here into advantageous relief, but they have to be sought in private collections; virtually nothing of this kind of music has been reissued either on LP or on the 78-rpm reissues of 1938-48. Absolutely indispensable from the first massive wave of jazz recording in 1923 are the performances of King Oliver's and Bennie Moten's bands in the Discography, as well as the earliest recordings of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings.

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Side One
Band 3

Castle House Rag
(James Reese Europe)

Europe's Society Orchestra: Cricket Smith, cornet; Edgar Campbell, clarinet; Tracy Cooper, George Smith, and Walter Scott, violins; Chandler Ford, cello; Leonard Smith and Ford Dabney, pianos; five unidentified banjoists and mandolinists; Buddy Gilmore, drums. *Recorded February 10, 1914, in New York. Originally issued on Victor, 35372 (mx #14433-3).* In addition to the performers above, Brian Rust (see Bibliography) lists an unknown flutist and an unknown "bh" (the abbreviation is not explained). Neither of the two recordings from this session issued here uses all players, and it is clear that the instrumentation is rather different on each.

James Reese Europe (1881-1919), born in Mobile, Alabama, and raised in Washington, D.C., came to New York when he was twenty-three. After a few years as musical director of a black touring company, he rose to prominence as a dance-band leader, a booker for hotel orchestras, and the organizer of the Clef Club, an association of black New York musicians that combined features of both a union and a fraternal society. Europe came to national attention with the release of four Victor records, no doubt occasioned by his position as bandleader and musical director for Vernon and Irene Castle, whose artful versions of new dances (tango, maxixe, fox trot) took the United States by storm.

Although the piano version is called a "Trot and One-Step," and despite the title, "Castle House Rag" has none of the rhythmic figures characteristic of rags. The harmony is generally elegant, but also bizarre in the first of the three strains, which combines C minor and major to vaguely "Oriental" effect, although the mixture may be an echo of the blues. After the third strain, a stop-timey trio in the sub-dominant, the recording departs from the sheet music in an utterly

unexpected harmonically primitive and ferociously raggy fourth strain. Cricket Smith's prominent and brilliantly executed lead cornet, which pushes aside the ubiquitous fiddles, and the solo drum breaks at the end are revelations. With half a minute of recording time left, Europe may have let his band loose for three choruses of ad-hoc basic rag, accidentally transmitting to us the only example from its time of orchestral ragtime extemporization.

Band 2

Castle Walk
(James Reese Europe and Ford T. Dabney)

Same group and recording data as the preceding. *Originally issued on Victor 17553 (mx # 14434-2).*

Like any good dance band, Europe's Society Orchestra knew its tempos and stuck to them. Both selections here are slower and less hysterical than the recordings of "Down Home Rag" and "Too Much Mustard" that Europe had made six weeks before. I take it that they presage the turn from the one-step and turkey trot to the fox trot. "Castle Walk" is not so interesting a tune as "Castle House Rag," a matter of little importance in view of the new facets of the orchestra's abilities revealed. First, one should listen to the violin embellishments in the repetitions of the third strain; second, to Buddy Gilmore's drumming throughout the record, but especially in its rising intensity toward the end. Charters and Kunststadt (see Bibliography) describe his drumming as monotonous and heavy, while admitting that "for 1914 he was sensational." Heavy, certainly, but monotonous? No one is a bore who could play the offbeat accents of measures 18 and 17 before the end.

The Victor company knew what it had. According to its advertising brochure:

The success of this organization is due to the admirable rhythm sustained throughout every number, whether waltz, turkey trot or tango; to the origi-

nal interpretation of each number; and to the unique instrumentation, which consists of banjos, mandolins, violins, clarinet, cornet, traps and drums.

I have trouble reconciling the excitement and joy of these performances with ingrained images of the New York elite for whom Europe's bands so often played. By listening to the music I think we learn something more about the audience, and about the urban black musical scene of 1914.

Band 3

Memphis Blues
(W.C. Handy and W. George Norton)

Lieutenant Jim Europe's 369th Infantry ("Hell Fighters") Band: The size of the group actually brought into the studio is difficult to estimate, but surely smaller than the approximately sixty-piece military band seen in photographs. I hear at least three clarinets and an equal number of cornets. Inner parts are stuffed with horns, but I think no saxophones. *Recorded around March 7, 1919, in New York. Originally issued on Pathe 22085 (mx # 67486).*

After the outbreak of war, Jim Europe enlisted in the 15th Infantry Regiment and was soon asked to recruit a very large black band, with a substantial subsidy from private sources. The band went to France in the fall of 1917 with a new regimental assignment but in fact served both as General Pershing's headquarters band and as a road company providing entertainment of all sorts to Allied troops and French civilians. After their return to the United States in February, 1919, the group recorded twenty-four tunes, virtually all pop material. Europe died of stab wounds inflicted by his drummer in May, 1919, while the band was touring, and the nation prematurely lost a man who could hardly have escaped being in the forefront of the new jazz.

W. C. Handy is the composer of record of "Memphis Blues." It has frequently been said that he became

the father of the blues only by getting to the copyright office first with material that had been around for years. Be that as it may, though two of the tune's three strains have the structure and harmony of what was to become standard blues, much of the rhythmic figuration is raggy (on some early copies of the sheet music the song is subtitled "A Southern Rag"). According to Europe, he introduced Vernon and Irene Castle to the fox trot in 1914 with this tune.

Behind this recording may be a written arrangement treated with considerable nonchalance. The playing is often quite free, with many short ad-libs by solo instruments in addition to the breaks at the end. The clarinets often disagree on pitch and attack. (We are told that in the initial recruiting for the band, Europe went to Puerto Rico for his clarinetists.) The brass sometimes play with great precision, other times not. This, together with surges of volume and a rather nervous pulse, makes an unusual effect, as of going in and out of focus.

The third strain is heard six times, with successive breaks for clarinets, three cornets (two of them growling in the background), trombone, solo clarinet, solo cornet, and trombone again, and a shave-and-a-hair-cut tag for clarinet. Although the level of rhythmic energy lifts for the repetitions, the breaks are a counterforce, and the overall performance is not enlivening. It remains nonetheless of great interest as an early example of a degree of improvisation (or "hot" playing) by a large brass band. In the fall of 1917 Handy's band made records for Columbia that are a fascinating comparison. The musicians are less skilled, the clarinets even more outrageous, yet the complexity of texture is not unlike that of the "Hell Fighters" band.

Band 4

Clarinet Marmalade (L. Shields and H. Ragas)

Same group as the preceding. Recorded around May 7, 1919, in New York. Originally issued on Pathe 22167 (mx # 67668).

The tune, recorded as a one-step by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1918, has become a Dixieland standard. Other groups at the time seem to have made relatively few recordings of material originated by the ODJB, however, and it might be fruitful to look for a published arrangement used by Jim Europe's band: there is one ingenious but rather contrived chord that could well come from such a source. The tune, a relatively simple two-parter without key change, is dressed up by an introduction, a transition from the first to the second strain, and a conventional march interlude in minor. Europe's recording conforms generally to the ODJB version. Typically, the clarinets often have the lead, but on the repetition of the second strain they play an obbligato that became part of the tune's oral tradition (compare the version on NW 250, *Little Club Jazz*). The whole routine is heard twice, with less incisiveness the second time. I doubt that this recording does the band justice and wonder whether the players were dispersed around the studio because of the engineers' technical concerns.

Band 5

Down Home Rag (Wilbur Sweatman, Roger Lewis, and Lew Brown)

The Six Brown Brothers (according to Brian Rust): Tom Brown, soprano and alto saxophone; Harry Cook, baritone saxophone; Harry Finkelstein, bass saxophone; three unidentified saxophonists. Recorded July 8, 1915, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 17834 (mx # 16142-5).

The Six Brown Brothers were something of a sensation in the mid-teens, and their recordings still

entertain saxophone buffs. The piece here is a rather elementary rag mostly by the New York- and Chicago-based clarinetist and band-leader Wilbur Sweatman. (His recordings for Columbia several years later are of considerable interest in the context of this reissue.) The tune drives into the ground the device of "secondary rag" (repeated figures of three sixteenth notes syncopated over the normal four-sixteenths-to-a-quarter frame; "Twelfth Street Rag" is a well-known example), which is, however, rendered innocuous by this utterly flaccid performance. Jim Europe's band a year and a half earlier had recorded a magnificent version that shows the possibilities of a substantial degree of extemporizing in the rag style, particularly when the tune and the harmonies are simple. In 1925 "Original Tuxedo Rag," which resembles "Down Home Rag" in two of its strains, was given a fiery New Orleans treatment in a recording by the Original Tuxedo Jazz Band. This may be evidence of the wide aural dissemination of the type.

The present recording exemplifies the difficulties of uninitiated white musicians playing hot, whether jazz or ragtime. The performance is academic: nothing is altered on repetition, nothing deviates from the arrangement. The syncopation in the third strain is awkward, neither jazz nor ragtime, and no doubt comes from a mishearing of something more vigorous. Other features that help define the hot music of the time by illustrating its opposite are the startlingly slow tempo, the lack of continuity between musical phrases, and the absolutely straight tone of the saxes. The minor key of the second chorus from the end is not, I think, part of Sweatman's rag and might be an attempt to make the music sound blue.

Band 6

Stock Yards Strut

(Unknown)

Freddie Keppard's Jazz Cardinals: Freddie Keppard, cornet; Eddie Vincent, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Arthur Campbell, piano; Jasper Taylor, washboard. *Recorded September, 1926, in Chicago. Originally issued on Paramount 12399 (mx # 2651-1).*

So far as I know, this group was not a working band, yet it plays with a control and a unity of concept that excites our admiration (with a small exception for the stop-time chords behind Keppard's solo). I take it that this is due to a history of association reaching back to 1910 or so. Keppard, Vincent, Dodds, and Campbell were all born in New Orleans around 1890, and such a group should reflect the style of the days before jazz was graced with recording.

The tune is an odd hybrid, with the first section (on I-VI₇-II₇-V₇ changes, plus a modernistic chromatic chord) heard only at the beginning, and the rest hardly distinguishable harmonically from the third strain of "Tiger Rag." The well-recorded ensemble has an unusual spacing of parts. The high key puts clarinet and cornet in more or less the same region, with the trombone generally playing low. The almost legendary Keppard, ranked high among reminiscers about the New Orleans music of 1910-1920, is heard in impressive relief, partly because of his style, and partly because of the wide-open texture. There is a lot of rhythmic and melodic imitation between the parts, despite the lack of tonal blend. At the time, Keppard would undoubtedly have been labeled old-fashioned in a Chicago dominated by Louis Armstrong. Despite Keppard's raggy style, the ensemble sounds modern, due in part to Jasper Taylor's light and very attractive washboard rhythm.

Band 7

Or's Creole Trombone

(Edward "Kid" Ory)

Ory's Sunshine Orchestra: Mutt Carey, cornet; Kid Ory, trombone; Dink Johnson, clarinet; Fred Washington, piano; Ed Garland, string bass; Ben Borders, drums. *Recorded June, 1922, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Nordskog 3009 as Spikes' Seven (sic) Pods of Pepper Orchestra, then shortly thereafter on Sunshine 3003.*

Another New Orleans band, also transplanted, made up of men who had been playing for fifteen years or so when this record was made (with the exception of Dink Johnson, born in 1895). Despite Rust's discographical information, I defy anyone to hear any kind of bass here, and therefore surmise that the recording may have been made between Ed Garland's departure from the band and Pops Foster's arrival. This group also lacks banjoist Bud Scott, who worked with Kid Ory at the time and would not have presented a technical problem to the engineers, as did a full drum set (in fairness, a photograph of this period does exist of a five-piece "Kid Ory's Original Creole Jazz Band"). Over the years the dating of the recording has vacillated between 1921 and 1922. In either case, it merits the label often applied: "first issued recording by a band of New Orleans jazz musicians. Yet the point is academic: less than a year later, more and better recordings were made by musicians of the same generation (King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band).

What is important about this recording is that it forces us to remember that New Orleans musicians had been on the scene in Los Angeles for at least a dozen years. It is also convincing testimony to durability of style, for Ory's band of the mid-forties, which for the most part consisted of his old associates of twenty or thirty years' standing, sounds very like this one.

Because it is a first, listeners may try to hear this recording as primitive, but this is belied by the ensemble's overall finish and coordination

and by the merits of Mutt Carey. Gunther Schuller (*Early Jazz*, p.74), while fully aware of the performance's value as a "reference to the early New Orleans style" and of Carey's excellence, is harsh on the tune ("dated, repetitious, and corny") and on Ory's competence. Perhaps it is enough to cover these points by observing that the piece was good enough for the Hot Five to record, and that Ory's inadequacies in facility and harmony did not prevent him from playing on some of the best recordings of the 1920s.

I find the performance rather low-key (figuratively and literally, since E flat puts cornet and clarinet in a comfortable but somewhat somber range) but unmistakably New Orleans in its easy bounce and its avoidance of novelty instrumental effects (notwithstanding the trombone glissandos). Perhaps this is less a matter of preserving an older, gentler Delta style than of lacking a rhythm section (though one appears in the credits). It's hard to believe that the group sounded like this in the dance halls of Los Angeles.

Band 8

Society Blues

(Unknown)

Same group and recording data as the preceding.

"Society Blues" is played at an uncharacteristic tempo for the time, about 150 quarter notes to the minute. Whether this is a feature of the "prejazz" New Orleans style is a matter for future research. Like many instrumental blues of the period, it is a multistrain piece, with the unusual features of a thirteen-measure second strain and a key change from E flat to F between the second and third. The fourth strain, using harmonies better known from King Oliver's "Riverside Blues," is played four times, affording an unusual chance to hear how simply and elegantly Mutt Carey varies the lead rhythmically. The moderate tempo, small ensemble, and lack of strong percussion give the effect of chamber music, showing that even at this

early date providing cathartic and exciting dance music was not the only function of syncopated music.

Side Two
Band 1

Bogalousa Strut
(Sam Morgan)

Sam Morgan's Jazz Band: Sam Morgan and Ike Morgan, cornets; Jim Robinson, trombone; Andrew Morgan, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Earl Fouché, alto saxophone; O. C. Blancher, piano; Johnny Davis, banjo; Sidney Brown, string bass; Roy Evans, drums. *Recorded October 22, 1927, in New Orleans. Originally issued on Columbia 14351-D (mx # 145001-2).*

Band 2

Steppin' on the Gas
(Sam Morgan)

Same group as the preceding, except Tink Baptiste, piano, and Nolan Williams, drums. *Recorded April 14, 1927, in New Orleans. Originally issued on Columbia 14258-D (mx # 143975-1).*

We are doubly fortunate that Columbia, on one of its field expeditions to New Orleans, recorded Sam Morgan's band in eight tunes, all of them issued: first, because, like Celestin's Tuxedo Jazz Band, it was composed of musicians mostly born in the 1890s who never left town or the touring territory of New Orleans bands; second, because their music was so good. The Morgan band was apparently very popular, therefore commercial, and characterized by a collective ensemble sound. It seems for the most part to have been unaffected by Chicago and New York fashions. It could sustain for an entire record a kind of richly textured, relaxed ensemble that a band like A. J. Piron's could attain only after two and a half minutes of coping with a written arrangement.

Despite this, the Morgan band was, I think, modern in New Orleans terms. This 1927 rhythm section sounds amazingly like those of the 1940s revival (or survival)

bands of Bunk Johnson and George Lewis. It also makes prominent use of saxophones, which later were often considered beyond the pale by purist aficionados of New Orleans jazz. They are played by the two relative kids in the band. Saxes hit American dance bands between 1915 and 1920, but reed players born in the nineties would not have started out on them, would regard themselves—with justification, considering the state of early saxophone technique—as superior musicians, and were not inclined to adjust to the upstart.

The band is big for the time and place (and I swear I hear a third reed on this performance, unlisted by any discographer), but even so sounds extraordinarily full because of the acoustics of the recording studio, the richness of the string bass, and the overrecording of the saxes. More important than any of these, perhaps, is the freedom of attack and phrasing that all members of the group are permitted.

All the tunes recorded on the two 1927 dates are either originals by Morgan or traditional (for example hymns, which were not to become part of the standard recorded repertory of New Orleans bands for another fifteen years or so). But the originals are mosaics of phrases and riffs that are part of the New Orleans public domain and not so sophisticated as to break the group's momentum. This is so strong that even the quadruple ending of "Steppin' on the Gas" doesn't sound ridiculous.

Although the band is modern in some important respects, the material is folklike and even country-flavored. This strain was still audible in what we now call jazz (and not restricted to New Orleans: compare the pre-1929 recordings of Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra); while probably viewed with amusement or contempt by the progressive musicians of the time operating in the urban North, it is for us a positive feature and a precious historical relic.

These were very nearly the last recordings by black New Orleans musicians in their natural environ-

ment while the music still lived without the artificial respiration of intrepid record collectors and tourists. The following ten years must have been tough for musicians like the Morgan band; it broke up in 1932, and many players left the music business except for occasional gigs.

Band 3

West Indies Blues
(Clarence Williams, Spencer Williams, and Edgar Dowell)

Piron's New Orleans Orchestra: Peter Bocage, cornet; John Lindsay, trombone; Lorenzo Tio, Jr., clarinet and tenor saxophone; Louis Warnecke, alto saxophone; Armand J. Piron, violin; Steve Lewis, piano; Charles Bocage, banjo; Charles Seguirre, brass bass; Louis Cottrelle, drums. *Recorded December 21, 1923, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 14007-D (mx # 81436-2).*

Piron's orchestra made three recordings of this tune in New York at this time: the first for Okeh as accompanying group for the singer Esther Bigeou; the second is reissued here; the third for Victor eighteen days later. A. J. Piron (1888-1943) is usually characterized as a leader of "society" bands—that is, bands capable of reading arrangements and smooth enough to play for upper-class white audiences. This did not preclude his leadership in 1913-15 of the Olympia Orchestra, with King Joe Oliver as cornetist. The band heard here was organized in 1918 and included a number of greatly skilled musicians not primarily known as "hot" players, for example Lorenzo Tio, Jr., and Peter Bocage. In New York the band worked at the Cotton Club, then, after a trip back to New Orleans, the Roseland Ballroom. For a few months in 1925, Piron, Bocage (as banjoist), and Steve Lewis also worked as a trio in the Hotel Roosevelt. These facts are mentioned to demonstrate that a smooth New Orleans band could adapt to the demands of first-class New York jobs.

Clarence Williams and Piron had been music-publishing partners in New Orleans in 1915-16. In 1924 Williams' New York firm issued a stock orchestration of "West Indies Blues," which this performance mostly does not follow. "West Indies" is no blues and in no obvious way a local-color Caribbean piece (I do not have access to the lyrics, which undoubtedly justify the title). It is nonetheless highly interesting for its exceptional harmonic and melodic simplicity and repetitiveness throughout. That it has three strains, all in the same key, is a great advantage: in the quite long (three and a half minutes) Columbia version, this restrained New Orleans band becomes progressively looser and jazzier as it has to repeat such basic material—something that must have occurred often on the job.

The art of subtle restatement and varied shaping of a lead is beautifully audible in Peter Bocage's playing. Tio, however, is better and more prominent on other Piron recordings. Gunther Schuller hits the nail on the head when he writes in *Early Jazz* of the group's retention of "the joyous, relaxed feeling" that was the essence of New Orleans playing, in contrast to the more modern jerky and nervous style of eastern players. Perhaps the contrast between South and East emerges in a comparison with the Victor recording, which has some tricky passages of up-to-date arranging and more solo work. But despite a possible insistence by the Victor recording supervisor that more solos be used to meet the demands of the market, they, too, share the grace of the band as a whole. Particularly interesting in the Victor version are Piron himself, who deserves a place among the thin ranks of jazz fiddlers, and Steve Lewis, who is not well recorded here.

Band 4

She's Cryin' for Me (Santo Pecora)

New Orleans Rhythm Kings: Paul Mares, cornet; Santo Pecora, trombone; Charlie Cordilla, clarinet; Red Long, piano; Bill Eastwood, banjo; Chink Martin, brass bass; Leo Adde, drums. *Recorded March 26, 1925, in New Orleans. Originally issued on Victor 19645 (mx # 32125-4).* Victor issued an alternate take some fifteen years later on its Bluebird label.

The New Orleans Rhythm Kings are famous for their Gennett recordings made while the band worked in Chicago from 1922 to 1924. But the six sides recorded for Okeh and Victor at the beginning of 1925—after the band's return home with considerably altered personnel—are better evidence for the sound of Mares and clarinetist Leon Roppolo, thanks to much-improved engineering. The tune here is an odd mixture of the folksy and the fashionable. Such recordings make it clear that New Orleans musicians, whether of ultimate African or Latin origin, are musical cousins. This is especially evident in the front line. At a time when most clarinetists could do little more than cackle and crow to perfection, few could play a blue note and sound serious. Roppolo could, and so could his replacement, young Charlie Cordilla. Though not as consistent or powerful a player, Mares shares much of the rapid vibrato and raggedness of a Mutt Carey or a Joe Oliver. There was, however, one major difference: the NORK and other white New Orleans groups of the day often verge on the vo-do-de-o mannerisms of white groups of 1924-25.

This recording is less intense and acrid than the Okeh made two months earlier, much due to Roppolo's departure. A comparison between the two clarinetists shows the difference between the really exceptional and the competent. The effect of Victor's notoriously conservative recording policies can perhaps be heard especially in the ride-out, which is looser and more climactic on Okeh.

Band 5

Bugle Blues (Robert Kelly)

Johnny Dunn's Original Jazz Hounds (according to Brian Rust): Johnny Dunn, cornet; Herb Flemming, trombone; Herschel Brassfield, clarinet and alto saxophone; Ernest Elliott, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Dan Wilson, piano; John Mitchell, banjo; Harry Hull, brass bass. There is no doubt about Dunn, and two clarinets are plainly heard. There also seem to be horns (alto and baritone) in the background, but no banjo. *Recorded December 21, 1921, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia A-3541 (mx # 80113-1).*

I wonder whether tunes such as this and "Bugle Call Rag" were belated commercial exploitation of war fever, or a carryover from the much more significant brass-band style. Anyway, we have here a three-strain blues, the last strain a variant frequently heard in the 1920s (a sixteen-measure chorus beginning with the IV chord). As in the Europe band above and W. C. Handy's Memphis group (to which this is related in personnel), the clarinets are grotesque and unrestrained, perhaps less tutored than in New Orleans.

Johnny Dunn (1900-1938) spent the last decade of his life in Paris, in flight, some say, from Louis Armstrong. When this record (his first) was made, Dunn had become a star of the New York theatrical scene. The stereotyped view of him is mostly as a specialist in manipulation of the mute, but his playing also impresses by its nuances of articulation and tone color without mutes. This performance shows how both the star and the very able trombonist could double-time over the sedate, even stolid, rhythm of the rest of the band. Double timing was one of the clichés of the period, but it was also a way of blending rag extemporization with blues or fox trot, which may in fact have been its *raison d'être*—apart from wowing the crowd.

Band 6

Dunn's Cornet Blues

(Johnny Dunn)

Johnny Dunn and His Jazz Band: Johnny Dunn, cornet; Leroy Tibbs, piano; Samuel Speed, banjo. *Recorded April 11, 1924, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 124-D (mx # 81685-3).*

Not your ordinary E-flat blues. The introduction combines faddish parallel augmented chords (made from the whole-tone scale built on E flat) with one of the most rhythmically tricky and charming passages I know from this time. Dunn is beautifully recorded, and no one can miss the varied combinations of tongued and slurred notes that make this sound as much like an étude as a jazz performance. The final wa-wa chorus clearly demonstrates the link to Bubber Miley and Tricky Sam Nanton, both of whom contributed greatly to the late-twenties Ellington sound. Dunn is especially strong in low and middle register, but his sound thins out above E flat at the top of the staff. This characteristic of the cornet was perhaps one of the problems that led to its replacement with trumpet when brass players moved to higher regions, leaving the middle ground to the saxes.

Though Dunn belongs in the New York orbit, he came from Memphis, for which a satisfactory jazz history has yet to be written.

Band 7

Old Fashion Love

(James P. Johnson)

Clarence Williams' Blue Five: Thomas Morris, cornet; John Masefield (or Mayfield), trombone; Sidney Bechet, soprano saxophone; Clarence Williams, piano; Buddy Christian, banjo. *Recorded around November 10, 1923, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 4993 (mx # 72041-B).*

Clarence Williams (1893-1965), born near New Orleans, was enormously important as a songwriter, publisher, recording director, and bandleader in New York in the

twenties. He was just enough better than adequate in the various aspects of his career as performer and middleman to command the respect and collaboration of many of the best musicians in town. But he perhaps spread himself a bit thin, and many of his recordings are low energy affairs by second-rank musicians. Not so his earliest band recordings with the Blue Five, with and without Louis Armstrong.

The tune is very pretty, appropriately related to "Careless Love," and lived on into the thirties. The form is verse (heard once at the beginning) and chorus, at a tempo about as slow as one heard on record in 1923 (usually in vocal blues). Young Sidney Bechet sounds here much like mature or old Sidney Bechet, with facile finger technique for very flexible and rapid arpeggios. He is not the only imaginative player here, though: listen carefully to the first sixteen measures of the chorus, where behind John Masefield's lead, and in addition to Bechet's festoons, Thomas Morris introduces some truly lunatic figuration.

The ensemble is a kind of geographical hybrid, with the three Louisiana natives guaranteeing an easy swing that sounds not in the least quaint. In other respects, it is uncharacteristic. Bechet presented Morris the same kind of problem he gave to a host of trumpeters in the next thirty years—so strong a melodic lead concept as to infringe on their normal turf. The results were often superb.

Band 8

I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle

(Perry Bradford)

Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools: Perry Bradford, vocal; Louis Armstrong, cornet; Charlie Green, trombone; Buster Bailey, clarinet; Don Redman, alto saxophone; James P. Johnson, piano; Sam Speed(?), banjo; Kaiser Marshall, drums. *Recorded November 2, 1925, in New York. Originally issued on Vocalion 15165.*

Perry Bradford was a good songwriter and indefatigable personality already in full swing on the New York scene before 1920, and some have seen striking parallels between his career and that of Clarence Williams. Here Bradford brought into the recording studio four of the leading soloists from the Fletcher Henderson band, with its drummer, Kaiser Marshall, but unfortunately without its tenor saxophonist, Coleman Hawkins. The tune as sung by Bradford is a kind of vaudeville novelty; it is far better known in an enormously different version by Bessie Smith.

The Henderson band at this time was uneven. Don Redman was writing arrangements of farsighted complexity, but the large group did not always play them with grace or energy. These virtues are abundant here. Armstrong is brilliant, playing in a grandstanding fashion rather unlike that on his contemporary recordings with a New Orleans-rooted group, the Hot Five. Buster Bailey, who has often been damned with faint praise, shows here, as well as in some solo blues accompaniments of around the same time, great drive and depth of feeling.

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- New Orleans Rhythm Kings, 1922-1923*. Milestone 47018.
- King Oliver's Jazz Band, 1923*. Smithsonian Collection R-001.
- A Study in Frustration: The Fletcher Henderson Story*. Record 1, side 1 (1923-25 acoustic recordings). Columbia C4L-19.

Side One Total time 24:55

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1 CASTLE HOUSE RAG (James Reese Europe)
<i>(publ. Edward B. Marks Music Corporation)</i>
Europe's Society Orchestra | 3:33 |
| 2 CASTLE WALK (James Reese Europe and Ford T. Dabney)
<i>(publ. Edward B. Marks Music Corporation)</i>
Europe's Society Orchestra | 3:17 |
| 3 MEMPHIS BLUES (W. C. Handy and W. George Norton)
<i>(publ. Jerry Vogel Music Co., Inc.)</i>
Lt. Jim Europe's 369th Infantry ("Hell Fighters") Band | 2:54 |
| 4 CLARINET MARMALADE (H. Ragas and L. Shields)
<i>(publ. Leo Feist, Inc.)</i>
Lt. Jim Europe's 369th Infantry ("Hell Fighters") Band | 2:52 |
| 5 DOWN HOME RAG (Wilbur Sweatman, Roger Lewis, and Lew Brown)
<i>(publ. Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc.)</i>
The Six Brown Brothers | 2:43 |
| 6 STOCK YARD STRUT (unknown)
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>
Freddie Keppard's Jazz Cardinals | 2:28 |
| 7 ORY'S CREOLE TROMBONE (Edward "Kid" Ory)
<i>(publ. Edwin H. Morris & Co., Inc.)</i>
Ory's Sunshine Orchestra | 3:31 |
| 8 SOCIETY BLUES (unknown)
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>
Ory's Sunshine Orchestra | 3:02 |

Side Two Total time 24:22

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1 BOGULOUSA STRUT (Sam Morgan)
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>
Sam Morgan's Jazz Band | 3:02 |
|--|------|

2 STEPPIN' ON THE GAS (Sam Morgan)	2:48
<i>(publ. unknown)</i> Sam Morgan's Jazz Band	
3 WEST INDIES BLUES (Clarence Williams, Spencer Williams, and Edgar Dowell)	3:34
<i>(publ. MCA Music)</i> Piron's New Orleans Orchestra	
4 SHE'S CRYIN' FOR ME (Santo Pecora)	2:48
<i>(publ. unknown)</i> New Orleans Rhythm Kings	
5 BUGLE BLUES (Robert Kelly)	2:51
<i>(publ. MCA Music)</i> Johnny Dunn's Original Jazz Hounds	
6 DUNN'S CORNET BLUES (Johnny Dunn)	3:09
<i>(publ. unknown)</i> Johnny Dunn and His Jazz Band	
7 OLD FASHIONED LOVE (James P. Johnson)	3:04
<i>(publ. Warner Bros. Music)</i> The Clarence Williams Blue Five	
8 I AIN'T GONNA PLAY NO SECOND FIDDLE (Perry Bradford)	2:35
<i>(publ. unknown)</i> Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools	

Full discographic information and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks to CBS Records for: "Bogulousa Strut"; "Steppin' on the Gas"; "West Indies Blues"; "Bugle Blues"; "Dunn's Cornet Blues"; "Old Fashioned Love"; and "I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle"; to Pathé Marconi EMI for "Memphis Blues" and "Clarinet Marmalade"; and to RCA Records for: "Castle House Rag"; "Castle Walk"; "Down Home Rag" and "She's Cryin' for Me."

Our thanks to the following for making their record collections available: Robert Altshuler; David Jasen; Hank O'Neal; The Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark, N.J.

Thanks also to Sam Parkins for his help.

Program consultants: Gunther Schuller and David Baker

Rerecording engineer: Doug Pomeroy

Cover art: Billy Morrow Jackson. "The Offering." Intaglio.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (Pennell Fund), Washington, D.C.

Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox

Photographs: Collection Frank Driggs

Library of Congress Card No. 76-750905

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