

YES SIR, THAT'S MY BABY THE GOLDEN YEARS OF TIN PAN ALLEY: 1920–1929

The naïve romanticism of the Jazz Age, when, as F. Scott Fitzgerald saw it, “people danced in a champagne haze on the rooftop of the world,” was nowhere more clearly reflected than in America’s popular music of the 1920s. The banal optimism, the desperate gaiety, the tinsel pretentiousness, the childish excitement, and the innocent beauty of the songs between the end of World War I and the Depression demonstrate how sweet and sad and silly a time it was. The subject matter of the love songs, the “nut” or nonsense novelties, the sentimental ballads, and the “exotic” dance numbers almost never attempted to deal with real events or emotions. As in other decades, the songs were written by hacks, craftsmen, accidentally talented illiterates, and, thankfully, a considerable number of composers and lyricists of extraordinary creative gifts.

Popular music was big business, and the sales of pianos and piano rolls, sheet music, phonographs and records, musical instruments, radios, and other musical paraphernalia added up to hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Earlier in the century the basic mediums of home entertainment had been the piano and the phonograph, which, with their by-products—sheet music, piano rolls, and records—brought several hundred new songs into American homes each year. By the end of World War I the record business was enormous, and it was not unusual for a ten-inch disc to sell a million or more copies. In addition, before radio the respectable home had its piano or pianola, and sales of sheet music and piano rolls reached astronomical figures.

There were more than a hundred domestic makers of pianos, and nearly all offered mechanical models or player pianos as well. By 1920 classical piano rolls by such virtuosos as Paderewski, Hofmann, Rubinstein, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, and Levitski, as well as popular selections by George Gershwin, Victor Herbert, Pete Wendling, Lee S. Roberts, and other well-known composers and pianists, were being released as regularly as phonograph records.

As the twenties began, the spring-wound, no-fidelity talking machine was already well established and probably the most popular home-entertainment device. Rudy Weidof, “the world’s champion saxophonist”; Homer Rodeheaver, the Southern singer of revival hymns who toured with the evangelist Billy Sunday; comedy singer Billy Murray; tenors Henry Burr, John McCormack, Lewis James, and Charles Harrison; the Peerless Quartet and the Sterling Trio; Scottish comedian Harry Lauder and Yiddish dialectician Monroe Silver; the Avon Comedy Four; the All Star Trio, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the Louisiana Five, the Six Brown Brothers, and Ray Miller’s Black and White Melody Boys; vaudevillians Aileen Stanley, Al Bernard, and Marion Harris; and the big Broadway names of Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Van and Schenck, Ted Lewis, Sophie Tucker, and John Steel—all were featured on records that became increasingly important in sustaining the life of popular songs. As the decade wore on, many new artists, among them Ruth Etting, Paul Whiteman, Rudy Vallee, Cliff “Ukulele Ike” Edwards, Vernon Dalhart, Lee Morse, Gene Austin, the Rhythm Boys, Kate Smith, and Harry Richman, helped by exposure on radio and by the heightened fidelity of electrical recording, became household words and national idols. Early in the 1920s artist exclusivity was rare and royalties

unheard of, and one could find recordings by the most popular singers and bands on a half dozen different labels.

In 1920 composers and music publishers were just beginning to recognize the value of dance bands as a means of putting a song over. But the hits were made in vaudeville, cabarets, and the theater, and the important money came first from the sale of sheet music and then from “mechanical royalties” derived from the sale of records and piano rolls.

Performance fees—paid by commercial users of music to the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers for distribution to its members— were still being used to pay the legal expenses incurred in the several-year struggle to establish the organization. ASCAP came into being shortly after Victor Herbert’s historic lawsuit against Shanley’s Restaurant in New York. Herbert contended that the restaurant had no right to use his copyrighted works without compensation. Many of the nation’s leading composers, lyricists, and publishers came to Herbert’s support, and in February 1914, America’s first performing-rights society was formally organized. Not until 1917, however, when the United States Supreme Court finally decided in Herbert’s favor, could ASCAP set up the machinery to license and collect fees from the thousands of theaters, cabarets, restaurants, and other establishments using music for commercial purposes. Four years later the first ASCAP “melon” of \$80,000 was divided among its members. The distribution of fees collected in 1975, mostly from radio and television stations and the rest from theaters, ballrooms, restaurants, nightclubs, and other commercial enterprises, amounted to more than \$80,000,000.

In the 1920s sheet music was sold in thousands of music shops, department stores, and five-and-ten-cent stores and found its way into millions of homes. Motion-picture theaters engaged pianists, organists, and, in the major first-run houses, orchestras to accompany the silent films and to play the popular songs of the day, often as slides with lyrics were flashed on the screen. The success of most songs, however, was dependent on their being performed publicly by leading singers and musical artists. For the most part, the hundreds of vaudeville theaters throughout the country were the testing ground for the product of Tin Pan Alley. Song pluggers wooed, cajoled, and often bribed singers and show bands to present the latest creations manufactured to order in the publishing houses of New York, Chicago, and, to a lesser extent, Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Acceptance of a song by Jolson, Tucker, Cantor, Whiteman, Vallee, Austin, or Edwards meant almost certain success, and music publishers made many performers “co-writers” in return for introducing or plugging a song.

Dancing was a major pastime throughout the twenties, and dance halls, restaurants, and nightclubs featuring popular dance bands flourished. In the middle of the decade *Variety* estimated that there were as many as sixty thousand dance bands working in the United States. Among them were those led by Paul Whiteman, Ted Lewis, Vincent Lopez, Paul Specht, Roger Wolfe Kahn, Art Hickman, Ben Pollack, Sam Lanin, Ben Selvin, Ben Bernie, George Olsen, Fletcher Henderson, Jean Goldkette, Abe Lyman, Red Nichols, Fred Waring, Isham Jones, Duke Ellington, Meyer Davis, and others nostalgically remembered by the generation that did the shimmy, the Charleston, the black bottom, the varsity drag, and other jazz-age dance steps.

Bands and, later in the decade, band vocalists became the targets of the song pluggers. Especially sought after was the radio presentation of new songs, for it had become evident to the music business that a radio plug was the cheapest and most far-reaching way to expose a song.

The major change that was to take place in the popular-music business began humbly in a barn in East Pittsburgh in 1920. Dr. Frank Conrad, of the Westinghouse Electric Company, experimenting with “wireless telephony,” began transmitting phonograph records and baseball scores to the few dozen radio receivers in the surrounding area. Almost immediately, the world’s first commercial radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, began regular operation. By 1930 more than six hundred stations were broadcasting in the United States, and radio had become the nation’s primary medium of home entertainment.

A new galaxy of musical performers whose talents were singularly suited to radio came into existence. Millions listened faithfully to the Silver Masked Tenor, the Happiness Boys, Vaughn De Leath, Whispering Jack Smith, Jessica Dragonette, the Clicquot Club Eskimos, the Ipana Troubadours, the A & P Gypsies, the Jesters, Frank Parker, Ethel Shutta, Rudy Vallee, Singin’ Sam, and dozens of other “idols of the airwaves.” Dance bands began late-night broadcasts from nightclubs, hotel ballrooms, and dance halls, and the hit songs, as well as the old songs and the new non-hit songs, were heard continuously by ever increasing audiences even in remote areas where live shows were rare or nonexistent.

As indicated earlier, the popular songs of the twenties had only the most remote connection with reality. The great majority of the lyrics were sentimental, banal, and intentionally or innocently infantile. Only in a few Broadway musicals and in the vast underground literature of the blues was there either sophistication or honesty. But there was a naïve and affecting quality to the songs sung by a blackfaced Jolson or Cantor, to the gin-flavored torch songs of Helen Morgan, to the unhostile ethnic material of Fanny Brice, and to primitive musical jokes like “Does the Spearmint Lose Its Flavor on the Bedpost Over Night?,” “Yes! We Have No Bananas,” “Who Takes Care of the Caretaker’s Daughter (While the Caretaker’s Busy Taking Care)?,” or “Abdul Abulbul Amir.”

Balancing the ledger were the songs of Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Rodgers and Hart, DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson, Thomas “Fats” Waller, Vincent Youmans, George and Ira Gershwin, Gus Kahn, Isham Jones, and a handful of others who managed to leave a legacy of beautiful melodies and memorable lyrics. Any decade that can produce “The Man I Love,” “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” “Someone to Watch Over Me,” “Manhattan,” “Stardust,” “I Can’t Give You Anything but Love,” and “Ol’ Man River” can’t be all bad.

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Whispering

(John Schonberger, Richard Coburn, and Vincent Rose)

Paul Whiteman and His Ambassador Orchestra. *Recorded August 23, 1920, in Camden, N.J. Originally issued on Victor 18690 (mx 24393-9).*

“Whispering” (1920) was first popularized by Paul Whiteman’s band in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles early in 1920 and then, later that same year, through the phenomenally successful Victor recording by the Whiteman orchestra. This record, with an arrangement by Ferde Grofé, catapulted Whiteman into national popularity, sold more than a million copies, and remained in the Victor catalogue throughout the twenties. The song sold more than a million copies of sheet music soon after publication, became a parlor perennial, and has remained in print for more than half a century. Its composers, Schonberger and Rose, like Whiteman, were violinists and had bands of their own. Rose also collaborated on such other major successes as “Avalon,” “Blueberry Hill,” and “Linger Awhile.” Paul Whiteman’s role in the growth and development of American popular music is unique. At a time when “jazz” had a much looser definition than today and was synonymous with almost all native American dance music and popular songs, he was called the King of Jazz. Among the earliest dance-band leaders to employ orchestrators, Whiteman pioneered in the questionable practice of offering syncopated versions of light classics for dancing. At the now historic concert at Aeolian Hall in New York in 1924, he conducted the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*, orchestrated by Ferde Grofé, with the composer, George Gershwin, at the piano.

Lyrics of this song are available from the publisher.

April Showers

(B. G. DeSylva and Louis Silvers)

Al Jolson, vocal. *Recorded October 22, 1921, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia A-3500 (mx 80041).*

“April Showers” (1921) is irrevocably identified with Al Jolson, possibly the most popular American entertainer of the twenties. A song introduced by Jolson—in a Broadway show, in vaudeville, or on records—was almost certain to achieve success, and there are dozens of standards, including “Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody,” “My Mammy,” “Swanee,” “Avalon,” “Anniversary Song,” “California, Here I Come,” “Toot, Toot, Tootsie,” “Liza,” and “Sonny Boy,” totally identified with this hyper-energetic, extroverted show-business phenomenon.

He was born Asa Yoelson in 1886 in St. Petersburg, Russia, the son of a rabbi. Jolson’s early career was in minstrel shows and burlesque. He made his Broadway debut in 1911 and achieved stardom in 1916 in *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.* In 1927 Jolson reached international fame as the star of the first sound motion picture, *The Jazz Singer*, in which he prophetically uttered his famous tag line, “You ain’t heard nothin’ yet!” After suffering a decline in popularity in the late thirties, Jolson found new audiences in 1946 and 1949 when the films based on his life, *The Jolson Story* and *Jolson Sings Again*, became enormous hits.

Soon after writing “April Showers” lyricist B. G. (Buddy) DeSylva became part of the prolific team of DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson, and in the thirties and forties he was also a major film producer. Louis Silvers, a pianist and conductor, became one of the more important Hollywood arrangers and composers. Jolson introduced “April Showers” as an interpolated song in the Broadway show *Bombo* in 1921, with Silvers conducting the orchestra.

Though April showers may come your way,
They bring the flowers that bloom in May.
So if it’s raining, have no regrets,

Because it isn't raining rain, you know,
It's raining violets.

And where you see clouds upon the hills,
You soon will see crowds of daffodils.
So keep on looking for a bluebird
And list'ning for his song,
Whenever April showers come along.

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Collegiate

(Moe Jaffe and Nat Bonx)

Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians. *Recorded August 4, 1925, in Camden, N.J. Originally issued on Victor 19648 (mx 32129-4).*

In the pages of the first incarnation of *Life* magazine cartoonist John Held, Jr. created a mythic image of jazz-age youth that persists today, along with F. Scott Fitzgerald's somewhat more profound but still class-oriented conception of youthful high life in the 1920s. The raccoon-coated, hip-flask-carrying madcap college student, who when not racing madly to hell in a Stutz Bearcat was frenetically dancing the Charleston, was also the inspiration for dozens of popular songs celebrating an almost totally unreal world. There were collegiate movies, collegiate musicals, and, as personified by Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians, collegiate dance bands.

Waring's small and lively original 1920s group was first called Waring's Collegians. It developed into one of the most prominent of the elaborate show bands of the thirties and forties, complete with a large chorus, comic turns, and colorful uniforms, and had one of the most popular radio shows during the Depression. The format during the twenties was jazzier and far less pretentious.

Moe Jaffe and Nat Bonx, writers of this 1925 song, were graduates of the University of Pennsylvania, where Jaffe had written material for that school's celebrated Mask and Wig shows. Jaffe went on to write a number of popular songs, the most notable of which are "The Gypsy in My Soul" and the 1940s novelty hit "I'm My Own Grandpaw."

C'llegiate, c'llegiate,
Yes! we are collegiate.
Nothing intemedjate,
No ma'am.

Trousers baggy,
And our clothes look raggy,
But we're rough and ready,
Yea!

Garters are the things we never wear,
And we haven't any use for red-hot flannels.

Very, very seldom in a hurry
Never ever worry.
We're collegiate,
Yes-sir-ree!

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Dinah

(Sam Lewis, Joe Young, and Harry Akst)

Ethel Waters, vocal. *Recorded October 20, 1925, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 487-D (mx 141164-2).*

Ethel Waters was probably the first authentic blues singer to cross over from an ethnic to a mass white audience. To be sure, she switched materials and became popular on Broadway and in white nightclubs with standard Tin Pan Alley songs or with pseudo-black songs calculated to perpetuate stereotypic concepts. A gifted actress as well as a singer with a distinctive style and sound, Waters was a pioneer blues recording artist, beginning in 1921. Featured in major nightclubs during the twenties and thirties, she also starred in singing roles on Broadway in *Africana* (1927), *Blackbirds of 1930*, *Rhapsody in Black* (1931), *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), *At Home Abroad* (1935), and *Cabin in the Sky* (1940).

In her best-selling autobiography, *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* (1951), she told of introducing "Dinah" at the New Plantations nightclub in New York:

Harry Akst and Joe Young asked me if I'd try a new one they'd written. And they sang it themselves for me, doing it fast and corny. "Is that the way you want me to sing it?" I asked. "Why not sing it your way?" they said. So that day I took the song home and worked on it.

The song was also associated with Eddie Cantor, who interpolated it in the musical *Kid Boots*.

"Dinah" was one in a long stream of sentimental songs about the South, often by New York songwriters who were almost always of Eastern European origin and whose experience with the South was limited to Miami or Palm Beach. Lyric writers Sam Lewis and Joe Young were old hands at this sort of song; some of their other efforts in the genre were "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody," "My Mammy," "Cryin' for the Carolines," and "Tuck Me to Sleep in My Old 'Tucky Home." Harry Akst, the composer, later wrote the melodies to "Baby Face" and "Am I Blue?"

Dinah, is there anyone finer
In the state of Carolina?
If there is and you know 'er,
Show 'er to me.

Dinah, with her Dixie eyes blazin',
How I love to sit and gaze in-

to the eyes of Dinah Lee.

Ev'ry night, why do I shake with fright?
Because my Dinah might
Change her mind about me.

Dinah, if she wandered to China,
I would hop an ocean liner,
Just to be with Dinah Lee!

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A Good Man Is Hard to Find

(Eddie Green)

Ted Lewis and His Band. *Recorded March 22, 1928, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 1428-D (mx 145798-4).*

Good-natured exaggeration, tongue-in-cheek buffoonery, sentimentality, and an unchallenging affirmation of traditional values were the principal characteristics of the most popular entertainers of the 1920s. Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson, Belle Baker, Eddie Cantor, Will Rogers, Harry Richman, Blossom Seeley, and Ted Lewis possibly aspired to artistry, but at best they were performers of inspired banality—and superbly skillful practitioners of the art of hokum.

Ted Lewis's billing, "The Medicine Man of the Blues," testifies to the validity of this estimate, for there was no more vivid symbol of both showmanship and dishonesty than the carnival hawker of worthless remedies.

Lewis was born Theodore Friedman in Circleville, Ohio, in 1892. He served an apprenticeship in vaudeville before leading his own four-piece band in 1917 at Rector's, one of New York's most famous cafés. Sporting a battered top hat, playing (indescribably) a clarinet, and prefacing his performances with his slogan, "Is everybody happy?," Ted Lewis ran his own nightclub, starred on Broadway, recorded prolifically, and remained active in show business until the 1950s. He died in New York in 1971.

Among the many songs particularly associated with Lewis were "When My Baby Smiles at Me" (his theme) and "Me and My Shadow." Generally, however, his repertoire was made up of contemporary popular songs and diluted jazz material originally introduced by blues and jazz performers. For example, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1927), by vaudevillian Eddie Green, was first recorded by Bessie Smith. It was and still is a perennial favorite of jazz singers and instrumentalists.

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher.

Gimme a Little Kiss, Will Ya, Huh?

(Roy Turk, Jack Smith, and Maceo Pinkard)

Jack Smith, vocal, accompanying himself on the piano. *Recorded May 3, 1926, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 19978 (mx 34683-4).*

It took less than ten years during the 1920s for radio to become a pervasive and powerful entertainment and communications medium that provided a speedy means of ascertaining the potential popularity of new singers and new songs. Most radio performers were drawn from Broadway or vaudeville, but some were created in the broadcasting studios. Among these was “Whispering” Jack Smith, whose soft, romantic baritone became one of the more familiar and comfortable sounds of the later twenties.

Smith’s relaxed rendition of the coy and innocent “Gimme a Little Kiss” (1926) will give today’s production-oriented listeners an idea of the simplicity of many recordings and most radio performances of the day.

Maceo Pinkard (“Sweet Georgia Brown,” “Sugar,” “Them There Eyes”) wrote the music and Roy Turk (“Mean to Me,” “I’ll Get By,” “Walkin’ My Baby Back Home,” “Are You Lonesome Tonight?”) the words. “Gimme a Little Kiss, Will Ya, Huh?” was introduced by Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians and still maintains a place in the repertoires of a number of surviving dance bands and nostalgic pianists.

Gimme a little kiss, will ya, huh?
What are ya gonna miss, will ya, huh?
Gosh! oh gee! why do you refuse?
I can’t see what you’ve got to lose.

Aw, gimme a little squeeze, will ya, huh?
Why do you wanna make me blue?

I wouldn’t say a word if I were askin’ for the world,
But what’s a little kiss between a feller and his girl?

Aw, gimme a little kiss, will ya, huh?
And I’ll give it right back to you.

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’Deed I Do

(Walter Hirsch and Fred Rose)

Ruth Etting, vocal. *Recorded December 1, 1926, in Chicago. Originally issued on Columbia 865-D (mx 142975).*

The romantic, dramatic, almost mythic story of the rise of the chorus girl from the Midwest to stardom on Broadway and in Hollywood was lived by Ruth Etting, the best and most popular female song stylist of the twenties and thirties. She was born in David City, Nebraska, in 1903 and began her career in the early twenties in the gangster-run nightclubs of Chicago. Under the guidance of her husband,

Martin (“Moe the Gimp”) Snyder, she graduated from the chorus line to solo singing in clubs, appearances on radio, and, in 1926, a Columbia Records contract. Impressed by her voice and attractiveness, Florenz Ziegfeld chose her to star in his *Follies* of 1927 and thereafter in *Whoopee* (1928), *Simple Simon* (1930), and his *Follies* of 1931. After that came a short career in Hollywood, her own network radio programs, and leading roles on the London stage. Her popularity waned in the late thirties, and she faded from public consciousness until 1955, when her film biography, *Love Me or Leave Me*, starring Doris Day as the singer and James Cagney as her gangland husband, was released. The film prompted a number of reissues of original Etting records and a resurgence of interest in several of the songs she made popular.

“Deed I Do” was introduced by bandleader Ben Bernie (“The Old Maestro”) and has remained in the repertoire of popular and jazz singers from its publication in 1926 to the present. In recent years it has become especially identified with Lena Horne.

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher.

There’ll Be Some Changes Made

(Billy Higgins and W. Benton Overstreet)

Sophie Tucker, vocal; Ted Shapiro, piano. *Recorded September 3, 1927, in Chicago. Originally issued on Okeh 40921 (mx 81314-B).*

Sophie Tucker was born Sonia Kalish in Russia in 1884. She began her career in cabarets, vaudeville, and burlesque and made her first important Broadway appearance in the *Ziegfeld Follies* of 1909. First billed as “The Mary Garden of Ragtime” and then as “The Queen of Jazz,” Sophie Tucker eventually became known as “The Last of the Red Hot Mamas.” British drama critic James Agate compared her to Falstaff and wrote that “when she is on the stage, you can no more take your eyes off her than you can off the sun when it is rising.” She remained a popular favorite until her death in 1966 at the age of eighty-two. Her theme, “Some of These Days,” will forever be associated with her.

In the 1920s Sophie Tucker achieved distinction as a monumental embodiment of show business at its extroverted best. Her songs and performances were displays of stentorian sentiment and not very sly ribaldry. The large, lusty, and bespangled Sophie had more than a little genuine jazz in her singing, undoubtedly influenced by the work of black blues singers of the period. There is also evidence that the Tucker style influenced a number of performers who followed her, including such disparate forces of nature as Bessie Smith and Ethel Merman.

“There’ll Be Some Changes Made” (1921) was introduced in vaudeville by one of its writers, Billy Higgins, and was first recorded by Ethel Waters on the obscure Black Swan label in 1921. It has remained a favorite of jazz musicians and barrelhouse singers ever since.

For there’s a change in the weather, there’s a
change in the sea,
So from now on there’ll be a change in me.

My walk will be different, my talk and my name,
Nothin’ about me is goin’ to be the same.

I'm goin' to change my way of livin', and if that
ain't enough,
Then I'll change the way that I strut my stuff.

'Cause nobody wants you when you're old and gray,
There'll be some changes made today,
There'll be some changes made.

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Sunday

(Ned Miller, Chester Conn, Jule Styne, and Bennie Krueger)

Cliff ("Ukulele Ike") Edwards and His Hot Combination: Red Nichols, cornet; Miff Mole, trombone; Jimmy Dorsey, alto saxophone and clarinet; Arthur Schutt, piano; Dick McDonough, banjo; Vic Berton, drums. *Recorded October, 1926, in New York. Originally issued on Perfect 11633 (mx 107160-3).*

Cliff Edwards's casual, low-key, and jazzy vocal style was very much part of the sound of the twenties. Edwards, who accompanied himself on the ukulele, was principally responsible for the faddish popularity of this small, inexpensive Hawaiian guitar in countless college dormitories and parlor entertainments.

Born in Hannibal, Missouri, in 1895, Cliff Edwards began his career in Midwestern saloons and carnivals; made the transition to vaudeville; and then enjoyed, along with an uninterrupted demand for his recordings, nearly two decades of popularity as a featured performer on Broadway and in films. Millions of later moviegoers have since succumbed to his charm as the voice of Jiminy Cricket singing "When You Wish Upon a Star" in the Walt Disney perennial *Pinocchio*.

"Sunday," which was born in 1926 in the Chicago branch of Tin Pan Alley, was the first published work of a twenty-year-old piano prodigy named Jule Styne, whose best work was to begin pouring forth more than twenty years later. In the forties, fifties, and sixties Styne, along with collaborators like Frank Loesser, Sammy Cahn, Bob Merrill, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, and Stephen Sondheim, would create the scores for such shows as *High Button Shoes*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Gypsy*, *Do Re Mi*, *Subways Are for Sleeping*, and *Funny Girl*. In addition, Styne's film scores and title songs, including the Academy Award-winning "Three Coins in the Fountain," have earned him a lasting place in the ranks of American composers of standard popular songs.

I'm blue ev'ry Monday,
Thinking over Sunday,
That one day when I'm with you.

It seems that I sigh all day Tuesday,
I cry all day Wednesday,
Oh, my! how I long for you.

And then comes Thursday,
Gee! it's long, it never goes by.
Friday makes me feel like I'm gonna die.

But after payday is my fun day,
I shine all day Sunday,
That one day when I'm with you.

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Yes Sir, That's My Baby

(Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson)

Blossom Seeley, vocal. Charlie Bourne and Phil Ellis, pianos. *Recorded May 15, 1925, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 386D (mx 140608-3).*

Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson, two of this country's most creative and prolific writers of popular songs, are, unlike the more highly publicized composers and lyricists for Broadway shows and Hollywood films, virtually unknown not only to our cultural historians but to the general public. This is ironic, because it would be difficult for anyone with functioning ears to pass through recent history without having encountered a substantial number of their pervasive words and melodies over and over and over again.

Donaldson and Kahn collaborated (but not always with each other) on dozens of notable standards, such as "Love Me or Leave Me," "My Buddy," "Makin' Whoopee," "My Blue Heaven," "Little White Lies," "At Sundown," "Did I Remember," "Ain't We Got Fun," "It Had to Be You," "I'll See You in My Dreams," "Chloe," "Carioca," "I Never Knew," "Coquette," "The One I Love Belongs to Somebody Else," and the insouciant "Yes Sir, That's My Baby" (1925).

At the moment of writing, early in 1977, Blossom Seeley at age eighty-six is an invalid lying forgotten by nearly everyone in a New York nursing home. Sixty-six years ago she made her Broadway debut with Weber and Fields; the next year she appeared in *Whirl of Society* with Al Jolson; she then went on to consistently top the bill at the Palace, New York's famed vaudeville house, for nearly two decades. Pert and tiny, Miss Seeley had one of those penetrating pre-microphone voices that traveled through even the largest variety theaters to reach audiences in the third balcony, and she is reputed to have been the first blues singer to perform in Carnegie Hall (1925).

Along with her partner and husband, Benny Fields, Blossom Seeley is credited with introducing and popularizing a number of important songs of the teens and twenties, among them "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans," "Smiles," "Japanese Sandman," and "Somebody Loves Me." The last became the

title of the 1952 Blossom Seeley–Benny Fields film biography, starring Betty Hutton and Ralph Meeker.

Who's that coming down the street?
Who's that looking so petite?
Who's that coming down to meet me here?
Who's that you know who I mean,
Sweetest "who" you've ever seen,
I could tell her miles away from here.

Chorus

Yes, sir, that's my baby,
No, sir, don't mean "maybe,"
Yes, sir, that's my baby now.
Yes, ma'am we've decided,
No ma'am, we won't hide it,
Yes, ma'am you're invited now.
By the way,
By the way,
When we reach the preacher I'll say,
Yes, sir, that's my baby,
No, sir, don't mean "maybe,"
Yes, sir, that's my baby now.

Who's the "who" I rave about?
Who do I feel blue without,
In the winter, summer, spring and fall?
What was I just "gonna" say,
I forget, but anyway,
Here's the most important thing of all.

Chorus

Yes, sir, that's my baby,
No, sir, don't mean "maybe,"
Yes, sir, that's my baby now.
Well, well, "lookit" that baby,
Do tell, don't say "maybe,"
Nell's bells won't she cause some row.
Pretty soon,
Pretty soon,
We will hear that *Lohengrin* tune,
Who for should she be sir,
No one else but me sir,
Yes sir, that's my baby now.

Mississippi Mud

(James Cavanaugh and Harry Barris)

Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra; The Rhythm Boys, vocal. *Recorded February 18, 1928, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 21274 (mx 41696-4).*

The Paul Whiteman recording of the 1927 song “Mississippi Mud” came when the rotund bandleader was at the peak of his power and popularity. The best white jazz and popular musicians in the world were passing in and out of his band, music publishers fought to get him to perform their songs on radio and on records, and his orchestra’s vocal trio, the Rhythm Boys, was establishing its own reputation as an exciting, readily identifiable group.

The trio was one of the earliest groups to employ a new vocal device on its recordings. “Scatting”—the use of nonsense syllables instead of words, especially in those choruses in which the melody was embellished the same way a jazz soloist improvises—was reputedly an inadvertent invention of Louis Armstrong’s. As the story goes, Armstrong forgot the lyrics to a song he was recording and, instead of stopping, simply went on vocalizing. This new kind of jazz singing was to be used extensively by the Boswell Sisters, Cab Calloway, and Ella Fitzgerald.

One of the less savory aspects of America’s popular culture is the insensitive depiction of blacks in our songs. Until the beginning of World War II the tradition of the nineteenth-century coon and minstrel song continued without anyone (including most black performers) making effective protest. The “mammy” and “darker” songs were mostly banal and sentimental, rarely ill-intentioned or deliberately hostile, but they nevertheless perpetuated the patronizing stereotype of a carefree, simpleminded race whose members were, of course, all born with natural rhythm.

“Mississippi Mud” is in the dubious tradition of “Swanee,” “Black Bottom,” “Ol’ Man River,” and *Porgy and Bess*. The lyrics are by vaudevillian James Cavanaugh and the music by Harry Barris, a vivacious and talented performer who, along with Al Rinker and Harry Lillis “Bing” Crosby, was a member of the Rhythm Boys.

When the sun goes down, the tide goes out,
The darkies gather ’round and they all begin to shout,
Hey! Hey! Uncle Dud,
It’s a treat to beat your feet on the Mississippi mud.

(Repeat line)

What a dance, Jim,
How they pound the mire with vigor
and vim.
Joy! that music thrills me,
Boy! it nearly kills me.
What a show when they go.
Say, they beat it up either fast or slow.

(Repeat first stanza)

Lordy, how I'm tellin' you,
They don't need no band,
They keep time by clappin' their hand,
Just as happy as a cow
Chewin' on a cud
When the darkies beat their feet on the
Mississippi mud.

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My Blue Heaven

(George Whiting and Walter Donaldson)

Gene Austin, vocal. *Recorded September 14, 1927, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 20964 (mx 39179-2).*

Some Tin Pan Alley songs just never stop. Europeans call them “evergreens” or “perennials”; music tradesters in the United States call them “standards”; a few academicians specializing in popular culture have timorously advanced the notion that they are the real American folk songs. The words and music of “My Blue Heaven” have enjoyed fifty years of popularity. Perhaps the academicians are correct. Certainly more folks have sung, hummed, whistled, played, and danced to this song than any one of hundreds of ethnic works you can think of.

Walter Donaldson is said to have written the melody of “My Blue Heaven” in 1924 in the billiard room of New York's celebrated Friars Club. Vaudevillian George Whiting heard the melody, wrote the lyric, and introduced the song into his act, but it was not until Tommy Lyman, a well-known cabaret singer, began to sing it in New York speakeasies and on a local radio show that it began to catch on. In 1927 Gene Austin's Victor recording enjoyed a phenomenal success. It sold in the millions and became the best-selling popular record of its time and continued in that position until it was surpassed by Bing Crosby's “White Christmas” fifteen years later.

Austin, whose casual, almost effortless singing style endeared him to the theatergoers and radio listeners of the twenties, continued his career until his death in 1972. His popularity, however, diminished in the mid-thirties, and today only nostalgia buffs are aware of the extent of his appeal to mass audiences of the twenties.

When whippoorwills call and ev'ning is nigh,
I hurry to my blue heaven.

A turn to the right, a little white light
Will lead you to my blue heaven.

You'll see a smiling face, a fireplace, a cozy room,
A little nest that's nestled where the roses bloom.

Just Mollie and me and Baby makes three.
We're happy in my blue heaven.

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Deep Night

(Rudy Vallee and Charles Henderson)

Rudy Vallee and His Connecticut Yankees. *Recorded February 6, 1929, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 21868 (mx 49925-3).*

Rudy Vallee, known to the present generation as a slightly misanthropic character actor in films, on television, and in the theater, was perhaps the first of the crooners and, as a musical sex symbol, the forerunner of such popular entertainment idols as Russ Columbo, Bing Crosby, and Frank Sinatra.

Hubert Prior Vallee (born 1901) attended the University of Maine and Yale, played the saxophone in vaudeville, and after several years as a working musician formed his own band, the Connecticut Yankees, in 1929. After an exceptionally successful engagement in 1928 at the Heigh-Ho Club in New York, where his famous radio introduction, "Heigh-ho everybody," was first heard, Vallee leaped to national popularity. In 1929 he starred in the early sound film *The Vagabond Lover* and began his weekly network radio show, which was to become the most popular variety program of the next decade.

Amplified with the use of a megaphone (in those years before sophisticated microphones and public-address systems), Vallee's thin, crooning voice captivated his admirers to the point that a subsequent generation knew as "swooning."

In addition to his appeal with such romantic songs as "I'm Just a Vagabond Lover," "Deep Night," and his theme, "My Time Is Your Time," a great number of Vallee's successes were not love songs: the Maine University "Stein Song" and the Yale Glee Club favorite, "The Whiffenpoof Song," were substantial hits, and such lighthearted efforts as "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries," "Betty Co-ed," "Vieni, Vieni" and "Oh Ma-Ma" became popular as a result of Vallee's radio and recorded performances.

The lyrics of "Deep Night" are credited to Rudy Vallee; the music is by Charles Henderson, composer of "So Beats My Heart for You," the theme of another well-known bandleader, Russ Morgan.

Deep night, stars in the sky above,
Moonlight lighting our place of love.
Nightwinds seem to have gone to rest,
Two eyes brightly with love are gleaming.

Come to my arms my darling, my sweet-heart, my own.
Vow that you'll love me always, and be mine alone.

Deep night, whispering trees above,
Kind night, bringing you nearer, dearer, and dearer.
Deep night, deep in the arms of love.

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Ain't Misbehavin'

(Andy Razaf, Thomas "Fats" Waller, and Harry Brooks)

Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra. *Recorded July 19, 1929, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 8174 (mx 402534-B).*

A few prolific and talented jazz-men, led by the prodigious Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and including Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, James P. Johnson, and Thomas "Fats" Waller, are responsible for many songs that continue to enrich and satisfy the world's listening and dancing appetites.

Fats Waller (1904–1943) was truly a delightful man. His ebullient spirit, his wit, his brilliance as a pianist and organist, his charm as a singer, and his vitality as an entertainer would have been more than enough to win him a lasting place in our national memory. But he was even more—he was the gifted composer of such notable ragtime-influenced keyboard miniatures as "Handful of Keys," "Numb Fumblin'," "Zonky," and "Viper's Drag" and such classic popular songs as "Jitterbug Waltz," "Honeysuckle Rose," "Blue Turning Gray Over You," "Black and Blue," "I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling," "Squeeze Me," "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now," and, of course, "Ain't Misbehavin'."

Introduced by Margaret Simms and Paul Bass in 1929 in *Connie's Hot Chocolates*, a nightclub revue, "Ain't Misbehavin'" was taken over by and became identified with Louis Armstrong when he joined the show early in its run. Armstrong's recording was a minor hit and, like a great number of Armstrong records, has never been out of print somewhere in the world. His distinctive vocal style and phrasing are admirably suited to Waller's buoyant tune and Andy Razaf's saucy lyric; but the definitive interpretation was given by Waller himself in the 1943 film *Stormy Weather*.

No one to talk with, all by myself,
No one to walk with, but I'm happy on the shelf.
Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

I know for certain the one I love,
I'm thru with flirtin', it's just you I'm thinkin' of.

Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

Like Jack Horner in the corner,
Don't go nowhere, what do I care?
Your kisses are worth waitin' for, believe me.

I don't stay out late, don't care to go,
I'm home about eight, just me and my radio.
Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

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—*Nat Shapiro*

Nat Shapiro is the co-author of *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya* and *The Jazz Makers* (Holt-Rinehart) and editor of the six-volume *Popular Music—An Annotated Index of American Popular Songs* (Adrian Press). He is the producer of more than one hundred albums, among them recordings featuring Barbra Streisand, Michel Legrand, Lotte Lenya, Lena Horne, Nina Simone, Yves Montand, and Mahalia Jackson. Mr. Shapiro was the creative catalyst of such notable theatrical enterprises as *Hair* and *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Ted Lewis and His Band. *Everybody's Happy!* Epic LN-3170.
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Sophie Tucker. *The Last of the Red Hot Mamas*. Columbia CL-2604.
Waring's Pennsylvanians. RCA LPV-554.
Ethel Waters. Columbia CL-2792.
Paul Whiteman. Vol. I. RCA LPV-555.
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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY (CD)

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Al Jolson. *You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet: Jolie's Finest Columbia Recordings*. Columbia/Sony 53419.
Sophie Tucker. *Last of the Red Hot Mamas*. Memoir Classics 529.
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Ethel Waters. *An Introduction to Ethel Waters: Her Best Recordings 1921–1940*. Best of Jazz 4013.
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YES SIR, THAT'S MY BABY
THE GOLDEN YEARS OF TIN PAN ALLEY: 1920–1929
80279-2

1. **WHISPERING** 2:50
(John Schonberger, Richard Coburn, and Vincent Rose)
(publ. Fisher Music Corp./Miller Music Corp.)
Paul Whiteman and His Ambassador Orchestra
2. **APRIL SHOWERS** 3:02
(B. G. DeSylva and Louis Silvers)
(publ. Warner Bros. Music, A Division of Warner Bros., Inc.)
Al Jolson
3. **COLLEGIATE** 3:01
(Moe Jaffe and Nat Bonx)
(publ. Shapiro, Bernstein and Co. Inc.)
Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians
4. **DINAH** 3:16
(Sam Lewis, Joe Young, and Harry Akst)
(publ. Mills Music, Inc. and Morley Music, Inc.)
Ethel Waters
5. **A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND** 2:45
(Eddie Green)
(publ. Mayfair Music Corp)
Ted Lewis and His Band
6. **GIMME A LITTLE KISS, WILL YA, HUH?** 3:10
(Roy Turk, Jack Smith, and Maceo Pinkard)
(publ. Bourne Co./Cromwell Music, Inc.)
Jack Smith
7. **'DEED I DO** 2:46
(Walter Hirsch and Fred Rose)
(publ. The Times Square Music Publications Company)
Ruth Etting

8. THERE'LL BE SOME CHANGES MADE 2:57

(Billy Higgins and W. Benton Overstreet)
(publ. Edward B. Marks Music Corp.)
Sophie Tucker

9. SUNDAY 2:58

(Ned Miller, Chester Conn, Jule Styne, and Bennie Kreuger)
(publ. Leo Feist, Inc.)
Cliff Edwards and His Hot Combination

10. YES SIR, THAT'S MY BABY 2:33

(Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson)
(publ. Bourne Co./Donaldson Publishing Co.)
Blossom Seeley

11. MISSISSIPPI MUD 3:34

(James Cavanaugh and Harry Barris)
(publ. Shapiro, Bernstein and Co. Inc.)
The Rhythm Boys, with Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra

12. MY BLUE HEAVEN 3:33

(George Whiting and Walter Donaldson)
(publ. Leo Feist, Inc.)
Gene Austin

13. DEEP NIGHT 3:20

(Rudy Vallee and Charlie Henderson)
(publ. Warner Bros. Music, A Division of Warner Bros., Inc.)
Rudy Vallee and His Connecticut Yankees

14. AIN'T MISBEHAVIN' 3:23

(Andy Razaf, Thomas "Fats" Waller, and Harry Brooks)
(publ. Mills Music, Inc./Anne-Rachel Music Corp.)
Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra

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