**Anthologies:**


This is a large collection of African-American games, singing plays, clapping plays, and ring plays. The anthology is co-authored by Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes, folklorist. Bessie Jones was born in Georgia at the turn of the century. She moved to the Georgia Sea Islands when she was young and became part of the cultural heritage there. During the Civil War, the original landowners had fled, leaving more than 10,000 former slaves. Northern armies rejected blacks, so the governing power and security was given to the local Georgia Sea Island citizens. This was a first for African-Americans. From the 1860s until the 1930s this island was isolated from the mainland. The islanders consisted of former African-American slaves and former Bahamian slaves.

The music from this blend combined with the isolation of the island produced a special sound that was hardly accompanied, down to earth and quite simple. Reflecting on songs she remembered from her childhood, Bessie Jones layered in hand claps and African rhythms. She became part of the Georgia Sea Island singers and performed with them at colleges and folk music venues around the country. Her association with Bess Lomax Hawes and Alan Lomax, folklorists, assisted in the production of *Step It Down.*

The book is divided into nine sections of songs, plays and games. There is an introduction by Bess Lomax, who talks with admiration about the childhood and life of Bessie Jones: “Her formal education ended when she was ten. Balanced on the edge of real poverty almost all her life, she learned early how to amuse and entertain herself and others with music—especially singing.” The majority of songs in this book are “plays.” Bess Lomax explains that she thought a “game” and a “play” were the same. As she discovers, a “game” has a consequence for the action. A “play,” according to Mrs. Jones, is not competitive and is plain fun. Bess Lomax noted that the Georgia Sea Island “plays” were like mini dramas that took on “new personalities; they were acting.” All games and plays are performed as a group with voice, gestures, and dance for self-expression.

Within the book there is a section of general information, historical data, and special directions for dance or movement. Learning the song by heart without the piano is mandatory. A discussion about notating notes and the style of singing black music is included in the “Notes to Parents and Teachers” section.

Mrs. Jones has much to say, and her comments are in italics. Bess Lomax suggests that you should not do any of the games, songs, or plays in an organized fashion. According to Mrs. Jones “there is no play until the play begins.”

This collection is vast and approachable to many people who care for children. Bessie Jones uses her own vernacular when speaking and explaining. She seems very comfortable with herself and genuinely wants others to know these songs and plays before they are another lost tradition of black culture. She would not be in Du Bois’s vision of the “talented tenth,” but to Mrs. Jones, that perhaps would not matter. There is no mention of the historical context for the
ring shout or circle dance, which was derived from Africa. There are DVDs and documentaries that show Bessie Jones performing selections from this book. (Beverly J. Whittington)

**Articles / Essays:**


This scholarly article gives a succinct yet thorough overview of the largely oral country blues tradition. While this piece is presented in an academic journal, the author’s descriptions and language would engage readers who are musicians and non-musicians alike. Eastman’s principal purpose is to extol the virtues of the performance, as opposed to the lyrics or music in particular. Emphasizing the importance of the singer/guitarist and his personality, the author concisely describes the nature and importance of vintage blues recordings.

Eastman begins this article by briefly discussing the history of the blues. He makes it clear that the blues has “no literary heritage,” existing purely as an oral tradition and used chiefly for entertainment. He also posits that the oral nature of the blues precludes a purely personal expression by the solo bluesmen of the early twentieth century. A good blues singer may present the illusion of a formless personal expression, but the reality is that he is operating within the confines of a well-defined folk art form. While most bluesmen claimed to have written nearly all the material they performed, Eastman argues that the many common themes in the lyrical content suggest otherwise.

Although many of the traditional lyrical tropes likely pre-date the turn of the century, Eastman emphasizes the importance of the vinyl record in preserving these vintage performances. Prior to the introduction of recording technology, the bluesman focused primarily on live performance. Improvised lyrics, guitar acrobatics, and a danceable rhythm were all integral parts of the country blues show, and a single song would likely last as long as the patrons were entertained. As the New Negro Renaissance was in full swing, ethnomusicologists began to preserve the songs of these so-called primitive musicians. However, the time constraints of the 78 rpm record limited the performers, and their sprawling “compositions” were whittled down to a three minute abbreviation. Again, we find music redefined during the Renaissance. Today, many of these blues standards contain only the familiar verses heard on an original record, though that particular version was likely a “frozen moment” heard during a one-off performance.

Separated from their musical accompaniment, most blues lyrics convey an air of sadness, defeat, or despair. However, Eastman redefines these lyrics, suggesting that the nature of the musical performance emphasizes survival. In other words, the blues records of the 1920s and 1930s are the product of an indefatigable people making an “existential choice to live.” These are common themes found throughout the art of the New Negro Renaissance, and Eastman makes a compelling argument about the true nature of the blues. In their time, blues performers recorded for record company executives who did not recognize the features of an oral tradition, mistaking honed improvisation for nervousness or forgetfulness. However, blues music gradually became recognized as a serious, important art form, and the early records of the country bluesmen


For students of the New Negro Renaissance, this account of the origins, composition, and reception of the African-American classical composer William Grant Still’s choral ballad And They Lynched Him on a Tree will prove interesting reading. According to Shirley, it was Alain Locke who proposed to Charlotte Mason that Still be approached to provide a tragic musical setting for a poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin on the issue of lynchings. Locke had heard a performance of a piece by another composer on the subject of kidnapping (evoking the Lindbergh case), and felt that the American social phenomenon of lynching should be similarly addressed. His proposal to Mason occurred in 1939, as the U.S. Congress was working toward producing a law against lynching. When invited by Locke to set Chapin's poem on the subject, Still responded enthusiastically: “For a long time I've wished to add my voice to those that are now protesting against lynching, but naturally I've been waiting for the proper vehicle to present itself. This seems to offer the right opportunity” (430). What ensues is the story of the cordial relations between Still and Chapin, Still's conception and composition of his music, and the eventual successful premiere of the piece at a Lewisohn Stadium concert in New York attended in person by thirteen thousand people and broadcast to millions on June 25, 1940. The concert had been planned for presentation the evening before, but rain intervened, and dignitaries who wanted to attend, including Eleanor Roosevelt, had to be content with a smaller reception at which the soloist in the piece, the accomplished black contralto Louise Burge, sang her solo section with piano accompaniment rather than with the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra and two choruses. The details of the political machinations involved in the production of the piece and the complications that, until these last couple of decades, have prevented it from being commonly performed are amply discussed here. The author, of course, feels that the time has certainly come for the piece to be performed more widely, proposing easy adaptations of Still's compositional prescriptions that would make it more accessible to both performers and the listening public. He concludes with a note of grateful recognition to Locke for proposing this piece and commends Still for his courage and for the racially progressive tenor of this and other Still compositions. Six pages of appendices and notes follow the text, which itself is amply illustrated with pertinent musical notations.

This particular article is much too densely written for wide usage in the public schools but might be useful in a secondary class studying the social environment of American classical music. In a high school music appreciation class, for example, And They Lynched Him on a Tree might be a good composition for exploring social and political influences on the production of modern American music. In the hands of a discerning teacher, this particular article, constructed...
principally on personal letters between Still, Locke, Chapin, the conductor Artur Rodzinski and others, might be of some value in illustrating some of the social concerns of the principal actors involved, especially Still. For historians, the article beautifully illustrates the cross-disciplinary intellectual ferment of the Harlem Renaissance. (Robert L. Breckenridge)


This article is an interesting examination of how radio became more than a gadget, but a means of communication. Radio’s early rise came in the 1920s with $60,000,000 in sales in 1922. As stations were created to reach the audience, it was thought that radio could accomplish many things: it could “make disparate peoples of the nation one, it could uplift everyone culturally by playing good music; it could provide news; it could provide crucial weather and agricultural information for farmers; it could educate.” At its earliest, radio reflected America’s imperialistic views of other peoples, in that it presented Native Americans and others in the stereotypical cultural way that white Americans would have defined them. In music, crooning became a popular style directly because of radio, as the recording equipment couldn’t handle the volume and harsh tones of “public” singing styles. This crooning style created a certain intimacy on the part of the audience who heard it. While TV might make radio look unsophisticated, TV is really just a shadow of radio in terms of the important ways society interacted with radio culturally.

This article is directed to historians of technology and those interested on the way media interacts with society. Since so much in music changed due to the ability to touch a large audience in the 1920s and 30s, radio’s importance is vital. Jazz had America’s ear, as did other music, and it could not have grown so quickly across the country without the support of the mass media. While recordings were popular, consumers were limited to the purchasing of a couple of songs, as opposed to the radio, where all was there for your listening pleasure. While I enjoyed the article and gained some important knowledge, I still have many more questions about topics related to radio and music, such as questions about radio programming, network control of content, the influence of local control, a national voice (and everything that implies), and mostly, how did musical styles adapt due to rapid dissemination of music through radio? Since African-American music was prevalent on the sound waves, how prevalent was the African-American audience? In other words, how did the technology spread into the New Negro household? (Shari Telaar)


Duke Ellington’s longest and most ambitious composition (approximately 45 minutes of continuous music), his *Black, Brown and Beige* suite, premiered at Carnegie Hall on January 23, 1943, which is about thirteen months after the concluding date of the temporal boundaries of our institute. However, this article by Ellington scholar Mark Tucker documents the fact that a great deal of the music Ellington eventually included in the piece was actually conceived and written
decades earlier. The article is a chronological narration of the development of the ideas and themes that eventually resulted in the larger work. Virtually all of the contours of this development take shape within the time frame we have been studying. Tucker asserts that the Carnegie Hall concert merely provided the deadline for Ellington to finish the piece and that he had been kicking around themes and ideas about its various movements for twenty-five years or so. The article is a very enjoyable read. It takes the reader from Ellington's unhappiness with the way African-American history was treated in his schooling in Washington, D.C., to his intimate acquaintance with the historically-themed reviews he saw on Broadway and in the Harlem clubs. Tucker asserts that one “strong possibility” for his motivation for presenting his interpretation of African-American history in tone was the fact that “he absorbed ideas about promoting race consciousness from figures associated with the Harlem Renaissance” (135-136). He also notes that Ellington was well aware that there were numerous other composers explicitly writing about African-American historical themes, including his mentor James P. Johnson (who wrote “Yamekraw: A Negro Rhapsody” in 1927), William Grant Still (who wrote Darker America in 1924, Levee Land in 1925, Africa in 1928 and his famous Afro-American Symphony in 1931), to say nothing of George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1935).

Having established Ellington's long-term interest in such a project, Tucker next documents the various stages of the realization of it—through a short period of work in Hollywood, an interest in producing a suite, then an opera—neither of which ever materialized until they bore fruit in Black, Brown and Beige. It was not until Ellington accepted the invitation to present a major work in concert at Carnegie Hall that he really was forced to sit down and string together cohesively all the ideas and themes that had been gestating during those two preceding decades. Tucker reports that Ellington was hurried in his composition as he worked under a deadline and, on at least one occasion, the handwriting in the score is that of Billy Strahorn, indicating he asked for help from his alter ego. At any rate, he led his band in a final rehearsal of the completed piece at the Rye High School in Rye, New York, on January 22, 1943, and then performed it for the public to generally positive reviews at the Carnegie Hall concert the next night. Tucker reports, though, that after performing it twice more (in Boston on January 28 and in Cleveland on February 20), Ellington never performed Black, Brown and Beige again in its entirety.

Tucker suggests that this composition is solidly of a piece with the Harlem Renaissance. He cites remarks Ellington made to his friend Alfred Frankenstein, the music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, in 1941 as he was thinking about writing an opera he wanted to entitle “Boola”: “I wrote it because I want to rescue Negro music from its well-meaning friends.... It's time a big piece of music was written from the inside by a Negro” (Frankenstein, San Francisco Chronicle, November 9, 1941, 139). Furthermore, Tucker discerns that Black, Brown and Beige's race pride, historical focus and celebration of African American identity had antecedents in the poetry of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, the fiction of Claude McKay, the art of Aaron Douglas and the writings of Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson. In a way, by fashioning an extended work from black vernacular idioms, Ellington fulfilled one of the New Negro criteria for artistic excellence...writing classical music based on ragtime and authentic Negro themes (148).

Finally, Tucker finds an element of autobiography in the composition. The history of the African in America depicted tonally in Black, Brown and Beige is personalized in the life and success of Duke Ellington at that Carnegie Hall concert. Tucker writes, “Elegant, urbane, talented and successful, Duke Ellington was a living symbol of his people's progress. By using his Carnegie Hall debut to celebrate African American achievement, with a work of heroic proportions and bold ambition, Ellington wrote himself into the script” (148-149).
This article will be of interest to scholars of the Harlem/New Negro Renaissance and to persons interested in the development of Duke Ellington's musical goals. Ellington is remembered, of course, for his achievements as a jazz composer and bandleader, but this article documents another side to the complex man that he was, a black man interested in depicting musically the historical experiences of his people in a serious musical genre. The article will be of use to secondary teachers who want to explore this side of Ellington with their students, possibly interested in looking at how this brilliant and proud black composer interacted with the great themes resonating with the most creative African-Americans of his era. (Robert L. Breckenridge)

**Autobiography / Biography:**


**Books / Book Chapters:**


This work of Christian theology is an exploration of the tradition of African-American spirituals for meaning and relation to the liberation motifs that Cone, who has taught for decades at the Union Seminary in New York, expounds as the principal architect of black liberation theology. He devotes separate chapters to current scholarly interpretations of the historic spirituals as black-generated music, the slavery experience out of which they arose, and the theological and Christological meanings he discerns in them. Cone then turns his attention to elaborating his own creative understanding of God's relation to African-American suffering and attempts to construct a demythologized interpretation of the concept of “heaven” (Chapters 4 and 5). His final chapter relates the slave-generated spirituals to the blues musical tradition, a more contemporary and secular expression of the same religious judgments and sentiments that he discerns in the spirituals. He considers the blues to be “a secular spiritual” and finds their lamentations about poverty, loss, and their implicit celebrations of human daily life, love and sex to be genuine affirmations of the aspirations of oppressed African-Americans to liberation and fulfillment. He finds in the blues, and, by his association of them with the blues, in the spirituals, a well-conceived appreciation of both the earthly and the eschatological dimensions of the Christian gospel. These songs are rooted in an experience of searching for a home greater than a mere “plot of land, more than a lover, family and friends—though it would include these.” It would also include “the unrestricted affirmation of self and the will to protect the self from those
who would destroy self. It would be self-reliance and self-respect” (142). Cone's conclusions about the fundamentally positive meaning of these musical traditions thus nicely complement my own project of seeking out musical signs of racial self-affirmation during the New Negro Renaissance.

Incidentally, Cone's first chapter explicitly relates the tradition of the spirituals to interpreters we associate with the Harlem Renaissance. W. E. B. Du Bois's highly positive appreciation of the spirituals is discussed in the course of his survey of their historical reception. He also makes reference to the Johnson brothers and to Alain Locke's positive evaluation of black music, but this is not, of course, the principal focus of his treatment. He is more interested in the religious interpretations of this music provided by Howard Thurman and sociologist Benjamin Mays.

This work seems intended for readers interested in expanding their religious awareness of the spiritual and blues traditions of African-American music. It probably would be most appreciated by music professionals associated with Christian churches or students of American religion. Despite its ample endnotes (143-152), its utility for students of music is diminished by Cone's failure to cite the sources of the many spiritual and blues texts he sprinkles throughout the book. For the high school teacher of music, this treatment of the subject will probably be of limited interest, except in cases where one's students are exploring the religious outlook to be discerned in these traditions. (Robert L. Breckenridge)


This is a historic document written by one of the leaders of the New Negro Renaissance, the multi-talented James Weldon Johnson. In this preface to a then-new collection of authentic African-American spirituals, Johnson discusses many popular concerns about the origins, character, value and aesthetics of this hoary musical tradition which, when the book appeared, was enjoying a revival of popularity, more attention from scholars and a greater standardization of form. Indeed, it was one of his and his musical arranger brother's purposes in this book to provide to the general public an accessible variety of spirituals with improved harmonization. Johnson does not intend to provide a definitive or fully critical collection, but he is pleased to set what he has collected (some sixty songs) before the musical reader.
Johnson's preface sharply argues for the proposition that “this mass of noble music …is America's only folk music and, up to this time, the finest distinctive artistic contribution she has to offer the world” (13). He defends African-American authorship of the songs and the natural African-American musical endowment; he identifies musical gifts peculiar to the Africans and ponders the crucial role the Christian religion played in the production of the songs. Consistent with the ideological viewpoint he and W. E. B. Du Bois sponsored during the New Negro Renaissance, he attributes the creation of the spirituals to “talented individuals” in the larger group of oppressed Africans during the period of slavery in the United States. He analyzes the texts musically and poetically and evaluates their utility as art songs. He is clearly pleased that these songs, neglected in the decades following slave emancipation, have begun to find new popularity, and he closes his preface by celebrating the “new…tremendously significant” cultural production that we now identify as the New Negro Renaissance, which included “the Negro's change of attitude with regard to himself” (50). The whole piece, notwithstanding a few possibly overzealous assumptions on Johnson's part, is a delightful example of intellectual support for the project of creating a new cultural consciousness among the African-American people of our nation during the period.

This composition would surely be useful for study by high school classes exploring the achievement of a new cultural awareness and identity by African-Americans during the Harlem/New Negro Renaissance. Johnson's assertions about the natural musical gifts of Africans and the distinctions he makes between the African and the North Atlantic traditions would certainly generate great classroom interest among students. (Robert L. Breckenridge)


This article was first published in August of 1920 as part of the monthly children’s magazine called The Brownies’ Book. The Brownies’ Book was an outgrowth of The Crisis, a monthly magazine founded by W. E. B. Du Bois, Augustus Granville Dill and Jessie Fauset. The Brownies’ Book had twenty-four issues, beginning in January of 1920 and concluding in December of 1921. The articles included biographies of famous African-Americans, literature of Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, and illustrations from Laura Wheeler Waring. A forward-thinking children’s magazine, it encouraged children to read, write and learn and to reflect about the social stances that were placed upon those of color. It included stories of uplift, confidence, and doing the right thing, all written in a child-friendly manner. Topics on everyday matters including nutrition, and thoughts from abroad were included. As an aside, tips for grown-ups were also included. A social-type network was started with “The Jury,” “When the Crow Flies,” and pictures sent in with captions from readers. The magazines were ten cents a copy or, for a better deal, one dollar for a full year’s subscription.

The selected story “The Heritage” appeared in the August (Summer) edition of 1920 and was written by Blanche Lynn Patterson, a writer during the Harlem Renaissance. The story opens at the beginning of the spring as a young girl is frustrated by schooling and by her need to work to put herself through school. Sighing and dropping all of her books, she plops down disgusted with her plight. A Mother of the community questions her, and at that point she breaks down, complaining of too much school, too much work and not a moment to rest. She has made up her
mind to go back home. The Mother listens and lets her know that she is the future with three hundred years to prove it. The Mother tells her she owes not only her parents but their parents. The weight of her past should be ever present in her mind. Not realizing she would be disappointing not simply herself but generations of her family and race, she now has a new spirit to continue on.

This story uses a bit of the vernacular of a southern grandmother as well as showing the grandmother comforting the young girl. Katharine Capshaw Smith states in “The Emblematic Black Child” (Chapter 1 of her book Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance) that Paterson “redeems the South by inscribing education as a particularly southern value.” “The Heritage” also plays into this southern scheme whereby the girl bears the weight of her ancestors on her young shoulders. The New Negro child is taking charge and accepting the challenge of improvement. The New Negro child, however, is not alone as pressures of the past are constant reminders like a broken record. We wonder about the effect of being a little New Negro adult when one is still a child. (Beverly J. Whittington)


This hefty and beautiful book is a fantastic resource for the classroom. It contains large, clear photos of performers and individuals related to blues and jazz in formal publicity settings, recording sessions, performances and even the odd and occasional photo of someone just hanging around. These images are clear and truly given the space they need to offer the reader/viewer a sense of place and context. Accompanying these stunning illustrations is a full text organized in a chronological time line by decades. The book begins with “The Early Years” and progresses through the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s—all the way into “The Contemporary Era,” which is found after the 1980s.

For the New Negro Renaissance, the applicable material starts on page 12 with “Ragtime,” which is quite early and out of our period of time but nonetheless sets up the foundation for the blues and jazz in the teens, music which grows in the 1920s and 1930s. I wouldn’t dream of teaching the music from the 1920-30’s without beginning with “Ragtime.” From page 12-141 are photos and information about the general trends and activities as the music developed, a list of recordings organized by performer, information about the main influences during these decades and events outside of music, key artists’ biographies, and quotations about the artists or their music.

This book is designed to be used as a reference work, not as a fictional piece or a book that teaches about jazz, so it seems directed to those who wish to supplement their jazz and blues experiences with a little more knowledge, especially those whose experience in this area is focused primarily on aural exposure. I can see where the book could be useful to students of all ages in the classroom yet still have application for me as a trained musician. Since this is a straightforward reference book, it provides the information that is expected, for those who wish to see and read more about jazz, blues and the artists involved. (Shari Telaar)

This small book contains an amazingly detailed look at the industry of music creation, music selling and music dissemination in America. The author begins with a quick overview of the music industry before 1900 and quickly moves on to the twentieth century, reporting that sheet music sales increased from $1.7 million to $3.5 million between 1890 and 1909. In 1909 over 27 million records and cylinders were sold as well. In this twenty-year period, Americans were converting from an active music experience to a more passive experience. By the 1920s, million-copy sales of written sheet music had come to an end (partially due to a printers strike and a 50% increase in costs), so record sales exploded. This development coincided with the expansion of radio and the need of local stations to create relationships with performers.

The book discusses the role of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the movement of composers to Hollywood when sound (and thus theme songs) became a part of movies, and the way Tin Pan Alley was still a hit-producing outfit into the 1930s. In 1939 the industry was maturing in terms of technology and musical tastes (no longer was the vaudeville song style maintained), but Tin Pan Alley protocols were still being followed as a professional copy of a song was sent to the people who selected music for coast-to-coast broadcasts. For example, in 1939 Bing Crosby’s Sweet Leilani sold 100,000 copies, and in 1938 “A Tisket, A Tasket,” sung by Ella Fitzgerald, sold 200,000. The Andrews sisters sold 300,000 copies of “The Beer Barrel Polka.” The book examines the interactions and developments of the recording/broadcast industry into the 1980s, but our interest stops with the discussion of how ASCAP won the radio war in 1941.

One can use the information in this book in many ways with students, including discussions of such topics as the following: When it came to money, did a performer’s race appear to be less of an issue in the recording industry than in other areas of society at the time? If there hadn’t been a printing strike, creating rising costs, how long would the death of sheet music sales have taken? What role did music really play in the movies for the average American? What role did radio have in disseminating music and musical styles in America? Did broadcast radio shape America or did America shape broadcast radio? (Shari Telaar)


Death and Jazz, written by Frederick J. Spencer, MD, is a book that covers the medical histories and subsequent deaths of jazz greats. Dr. Spencer is a professor and associate dean emeritus of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine.

Death and Jazz consists of eleven chapters that are organized according to specific causes of death and/or disease categories. They include the following: ALS, cancer, cardiovascular
disease, cholera, dental disease, diabetes, ear disease, eye disease, food poisoning, homicide, influenza, and mental illness. Dr. Spencer’s book also provides information on the lifestyles, circumstances, rumors, and conditions that led to many of the deaths.

This book should prove to be a valuable resource for teachers, providing factual evidence about these historic musicians. It should also be interesting for students who would like to delve further into these musicians’ lives. Such information encourages them to do personal reading and research on the musicians and the times when they lived. In turn, this self-directed learning should lead to increased retention of knowledge on the topic. (Tom Tacke)


This collection of essays offers the reader a wide range of viewpoints, opinions, accounts, and facts concerning the rich history of blues music. Because these various pieces were published throughout the twentieth century, the entirety of the work is not necessarily applicable to New Negro Renaissance study. However, the years 1919 through 1941 include much of the nascent music’s explosion in popularity as well as an inordinate amount of evolution. Therefore, the New Negro Renaissance looms large in this far-reaching volume.

There are several essays in particular which are relevant to the New Negro Renaissance. One deals with the birth of the blues, a murky subject if ever there was one. In a 1982 piece, David Evans cites period interviews with influential blues artist Son House. House lists a variety of “roots” music that formed the building blocks of the blues, including “corn songs,” field hollers, and a variation on traditional spirituals he terms “long meter.” Many of these folk styles are seldom referenced in historical accounts, and Son House’s first-hand account is an invaluable addition to the scholarship.

Another icon of the New Negro blues era was Charlie Patton, and scholar Stephen Calt analyzes Patton’s “Pony Blues.” Calt maintains that Patton possessed an uncanny and singular ability to play complex and distinct vocal and instrumental rhythms simultaneously. In addition, he explores the history of the blues as dance music, bridging the gap between the rural origins of Son House’s music and the more modern style of players like Robert Johnson or Mississippi John Hurt.

Other Renaissance figures, including harmonica players DeFord Bailey and Sonny Terry, are explored elsewhere in the book, in addition to first-hand concert reviews by Carl Van Vechten. In other words, this book is a treasure trove of modern and historical blues information, and the sheer variety of pieces found here would serve everyone from the university researcher to the casual blues fan. In particular, the musicians of the New Negro Renaissance are well-represented, as readers are privy to both eyewitness and historical accounts of these fascinating and influential artists. (Aaron Watson)


Children’s Books:


*Stompin’ at the Savoy* has a title that says “fun” to young people who would be hearing about this book. Most colorful and believable are the jazz watercolor pictures by illustrator Richard Yarde. The story leads a reluctant young dancer back into time of the Savoy Ballroom of the 1930s.

Mindy is concerned about her upcoming dance recital. She loves to dance for her three aunts, Auntie Norma, Auntie Naomi, and Auntie Willie Mae, all old-fashioned dancers themselves. Her recital however would mean she would have to dance in front of unknown people! When she is upset in her room, a “talking drum” comes alive and convinces Mindy to change her mind by taking her to the “home of happy feet!” She now is transported back to the legendary Savoy Ballroom where she is the star. Mindy gets to dance to the music of Chick Webb, Ella Fitzgerald, Fletcher Henderson, and Benny Goodman. Is it a dream or not? Mindy gets back home just in time for her dance recital, full of new confidence.

Although a picture book for young readers, *Stompin’ at the Savoy* could set the stage for older students researching about the Savoy’s presence in Harlem from 1926-1958. The Savoy had integrated audiences where other clubs had white-only audiences. Of interest would be the bands that performed there, the singers as well as the dancers. In the story, Mindy’s aunts have first names with a connection to the Lindy Hopper dancers who performed at the Savoy. Learning about the Lindy Hop, Susie Q, or Black Bottom dances and sharing a mini-in-class performance for the younger students would make learning fun on both grade levels. The history of African and African-American ring dances, as well as dance sparring in competitions and performances, connects the past and the historical elements of the Savoy with the future. The presence of family makes this story generational. Getting over that fear before performing is something all can relate to. (Beverly J. Whittington)


The title of this children’s book lets you know that a “fly” is one of the jazz musician bugs. Turn the first page, and you meet the jazz quartet of Willie the Worm (bass), Nancy the Gnat (sax), Sammy the Centipede (piano) and, of course, the Jazz Fly (drums). Jazz Fly is on the fly because he has gotten lost while hooking up with his bug band. He asks a few farm friends along the way, speaking in his native fly language. He says: “ZA-baza, BOO-zaba, Zee-rah Roni?” Frog, not understanding, replies with: RRRibit, Rrrribit. When he meets donkey, the donkey shouts: “Hee Haw, Hee Haw.” Finally dog seems to understand that Jazz Fly needs directions to his gig and points him in the right direction. Gollub uses an array of words to describe the musician bugs. “Beetles and maggots had come to hear the show. They were dining with the locusts by the fireflies’ glow. The band was looking antsy. It was half past eight. They grumbled, “Man, this fly is always late!””

The book is excellently illustrated as Hanke captures a small 1930s nightspot with small cabaret-style tables and chairs. Ants dressed in tuxedos creep in and out while slug patrons sit
sluggishly at tables. All seems fine till Queen Bee steps in and demands a new beat “or this band is out!”

The author uses three words when explaining the art form of jazz: ingenuity, improvisation and interpretation. When Jazz Fly has to quickly make a new beat, he remembers the sounds that he heard earlier from farm friends and bug musicians. Jazz Fly adds them into his own language (ZA-baza, Boo-zaba, and ZEE-zah RO-ni) and creates something new. This type of singing turns into scat.

This is a book that just will not sit on a shelf. It has an enclosed CD narration with rich jazz quartet sounds. Even if you are not knowledgeable about the jazz era, the story and CD guide you to realize the inventiveness of this genre. Vocally the voice turns into a chameleon in a musical instrument in jazz. It slides, dips, whines and scoops with your musical voice or instrument. In the author’s notes, Gollub mentions that the jazz phrasing done throughout the book is how early African-Americans applied this scatting to jazz. Students could echo sing the refrain in small groups or solos, perhaps adding to their scats. The showcasing of sections or instruments emphasizing the individual is paramount in jazz. This is a good introduction for children into jazz and scat singing. (Beverly J. Whittington)


This children’s book is a reprint of the 2004 edition. The lush, vivid illustrations by Jerry Pinkney allow the reader to dream this migration journey. Pinkney researched and listened to real narratives about families that were leaving the South and going north for better jobs and better opportunities. This vast migration north led families and children to leave what little they had in the South, to step out on faith and arrive in Detroit, in Chicago, in Philadelphia or New York or other cities with high hopes.

Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog wrote God Bless the Child’s music and lyrics in a brief afternoon in 1939. The song was recorded in 1941. Legend has it her Mother Sadie wanted to borrow money for a business venture, and Billie responded with “God bless the child that’s got his own.” Whether this story is fully true or not, the words are biblically inspired, and the simple melody is like a spiritual.

The picture book opens with “Them’s that’s got shall get, Them’s that’s not shall lose, so the Bible said, And it still is news.” This family has very little to pack up and take except their unfilled dreams. The empty house pictured is shared only with an empty red truck and tire swing. What is depicted beautifully is that the whole family is together on this journey. Unity is shown in each picture as if it will be a test of strength upon the family’s arrival in the North.

Though a northern city is not exactly mentioned, we sense that the windy city of Chicago is the destination with the above ground railroad, the ”L.” One of the last pictures shows a teacher now with her new student from the South. On the blackboard Jean Baptiste Point du Sable’s name has been written. Jean Baptiste, a black fur trader, was important in the history of Chicago. The city is bustling and busy, but it is not easy living. Pinkney’s final illustration is of the schoolroom, in keeping with the historical context of children of color being educated. This is the future and the golden ticket scholars have been talking and writing about. Life will not be a crystal stair, but the hope of the next generation through education will be well worth it.

This book includes a CD with Billie Holiday singing. Reading the book with the CD or without it, or playing just the music could be one of many possibilities. Students sometimes like to figure out what items they would take if they were going on a trip and could bring only three
items. Teachers can help students understand why in this migration north the child pictured learning is in fact “getting his/her own.” (Beverly J. Whittington)

Documentary Films:


*American Roots Music* is a two-disc, four-episode documentary on various styles of music that shaped and changed the popular music of today. Included in this collection is coverage of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the delta blues, the beginnings of gospel music, Lead Belly and Lomax, and many more styles/movements after 1941.

*American Roots Music* provides good material to introduce some of the music, concepts, and directions of The New Negro Renaissance. The documentary offers good coverage of the Fisk Jubilee singers as well as coverage of the blues music of Son House, Robert Johnson, and Lead Belly. It introduces the beginnings of gospel music from the early contributions of Thomas Dorsey, including some video footage of Dorsey as a young man and then later in his life.

One of the strengths of *American Roots Music* is its coverage of a wide variety of music, both black and white. It provides a glimpse of the broad range of roots music that concurrently existed and developed through the early- to mid-twentieth century. This broad coverage can also be a weakness of the documentary because the depth of description is often limited, especially concerning important musicians of each style covered. Teachers may find that the interest level of the video is limited for some students who may want something more dynamic and “upbeat.” Nevertheless, the video does provide many opportunities for short clips to be used to enhance lessons. Aiding the use of *American Roots Music* is the PBS website that has summaries, lesson plans, and other valuable teacher resources. As a complete collection, *American Roots Music* provides teachers with a multitude of instructional materials and resources. (Tom Tacke)


This video introduces the composer and piano/organ virtuoso Thomas “Fats” Waller to students of jazz and of the Harlem Renaissance generally. His technique and virtuosity are illustrated with clips from filmed performances and discussed by other pianists with whom he associated and upon whom he has exerted an influence, either directly or otherwise. His relationship with James P. Johnson and Willie “the Lion” Smith, originally as a student and then as a master, is presented and their stride modes of play are demonstrated. Waller’s influence on Art Tatum, Count Basie, Cab Calloway and even Thelonius Monk—who is reported here to have met Waller as a youth—are all treated with segments from their playing. The musical moments included are charming, and the piano techniques demonstrated are astonishing. Little discussion is provided about the personal tragedies of Waller’s short life, and not much of his compositional legacy is presented. The focus is principally on his keyboard influence.

This video would be useful in any classroom where the artistic legacies of the great popular pianists and entertainers of the Harlem Renaissance are being studied. It neatly places Waller in a dynamic piano-playing tradition and gives ample illustrations of his virtuosity and influence. Disappointingly, however, there is no treatment here of Waller’s virtuosity on the organ, which he is reported (even here) to have favored playing over the piano. (Robert L. Breckenridge)

*Marian Anderson: The Story of the Voice that Broke Barriers* was originally a PBS broadcast that was recorded and distributed on VHS format. It is a biography of Anderson’s life from the time she was a young girl through her late-career performance as Bizet’s Carmen with the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1959. The video is a good teaching tool for music appreciation students from junior high ages through the undergraduate college levels.

Marian Anderson was an African-American contralto who had an active performance calendar for over forty years, from her mid-20s in the mid 1920s until her farewell tour in 1964. *Marian Anderson: The Story of the Voice that Broke Barriers* tells her story through historical accounts and interviews with Anderson herself, with past newspaper reporters, her accompanists, and other admirers. She speaks of her early training and her appreciation for the sacrifices her mother made to allow her to develop her voice. She also speaks of the wonderful feeling she had when she was able to support her mother with her singing so that her mother no longer had to work as a cleaning woman for a department store.

The focal point of the video in terms of the New Negro Renaissance is its description of the racist conflicts that led to Anderson’s 1939 Easter Sunday performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. The events that led to that performance included Eleanor Roosevelt’s resignation from the Daughters of the American Revolution organization because of their inability/unwillingness to change racist policies that governed black performances at Constitution Hall. Mrs. Roosevelt turned to the Department of the Interior to facilitate the performance at the national monument. The performance was in front of over 75,000 people and included the President, the Supreme Court Justices, and other high-ranking public officials. It should also be noted that Martin Luther King, Jr., was in attendance, thus making his Lincoln Memorial “I Have a Dream” speech all the more interesting to students.

Marian Anderson opened with “America” and sang the first verse as follows:

My country ‘tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee WE sing

This substitution of the word “we” was the only change that she made to the song, and it represents the philosophical intent of the New Negro Renaissance. In *Marian Anderson: The Story of the Voice that Broke Barriers*, Todd Duncan, the singer who was the original Porgy in *Porgy ’n Bess*, spoke of his attendance, saying he had never felt as proud to be an American and never as proud to be an American Negro. The video’s display of Marian Anderson’s dignity and humility is a good example of the success of the New Negro Renaissance. (Tom Tacke)

**Films:**

Musical Recordings:


This collection of Burleigh's art songs, sketches for unaccompanied piano, and arrangements of a few traditional Negro spirituals was recorded in 1995. Four solo artists perform, accompanied on the piano by Joseph Smith, who researched and selected for performance all of the pieces presented here. Smith also wrote the helpful liner notes accompanying the recordings. In these notes he briefly introduces Burleigh, famously a student and friend of Antonin Dvorak, the great Czech composer who spent a few years directing the National Conservatory of Music in New York at the close of the nineteenth century. Now remembered almost solely for his work with the spirituals tradition at the turn of the last century, Burleigh has suffered decades of popular neglect of his own compositions. Since twenty-five of the thirty selections on this recording are not spirituals, it can serve as a valuable corrective to the popular impression of Burleigh's musical career. About half of the original material included here was written after 1915, the latest piece included being a 1935 musical setting of Langston Hughes's “Lovely Dark and Lonely One.” The recording thus includes samples of Burleigh's music composed across the first four decades of the twentieth century.

This CD seems directed toward popular tastes in art song and spiritual music. The performances of the soloists and of Mr. Smith are all lovely and deserve a close listening. The notes include the full texts of all pieces in which the vocalists perform.

This recording will be of value to students of the music of the New Negro Renaissance, not merely on account of the setting of the Hughes poem but also because it provides numerous examples of the musical production to which classical composers aspired during the decades of the twenties and thirties. It forcefully gives the lie to the popular belief that dance club jazz was the only form of popular music being written during the period. It will complement music written in similarly serious genres during the period by African-American composers such as Still and Ellington.

*From the Southland* will be useful in the secondary classroom, in a music appreciation context, or in a history class studying the New Negro Renaissance. The music offered here bears witness to the ambition of Burleigh and others sharing his tastes and talents to meet the challenge posed by James Weldon Johnson and W. E. B. Du Bois to create art that uplifts and ennobles the African-American people. (Robert L. Breckenridge)


This overview of Huddie Ledbetter's early recording output features alternate takes of eighteen of the legendary performer's songs. Ostensibly, this disc would be of value to the scholar or the Leadbelly completist. However, the recording quality is top-notch for the time period, and most of the versions are indistinguishable from the more familiar master recordings.
Many of Leadbelly’s most famous songs lend themselves extremely well to young singers. Therefore, this would be a great introduction to the 12-string master’s unique style and sound for any listener, young or old. In fact, performers who specialize in 12-string picking are relatively rare, and this album would allow young listeners to compare/contrast the 12-string to the more common 6-string acoustic.

While this particular collection was released in 1991, all of these sides were recorded in New York City between January and March of 1935, just one year after Leadbelly’s second release from prison. Arguably, his two most famous compositions are “Rock Island Line” and “Goodnight Irene,” and it should be noted that this disc does not include those American classics. However, the songs here are of equal caliber, and Leadbelly’s vocals and musicianship are at peak power and performance. In addition, the liner notes feature several high-quality photographs in addition to a biographical sketch of the singer.

The New Negro Renaissance was in full swing in 1935, and, of course, the epicenter was New York City. Therefore, this recording serves as a prime example of the nascent stages of the folk revival. Prior to this era of redefinition, a folksinger of Leadbelly’s nature would have been lucky to be recorded on Alan Lomax’s field equipment, leaving something to be desired in the vintage product. By 1935, however, listeners and scholars alike were recognizing the value in Leadbelly’s authentic, unique expression, and we are fortunate that these rural performers were afforded the chance to record in state-of-the-art studios. The performances captured on this disc are representative of Leadbelly at his best.

Obviously, young singers are unable to sing in a voice that even approximates Leadbelly’s style. (Nor should they try.) However, these songs represent an important, virtually extinct part of our musical heritage, and it is important for students to hear vintage, quality examples of American music. The depth of Leadbelly’s voice, coupled with his unique biographical experience, makes for a fascinating glimpse at the New Negro Renaissance’s newfound appreciation of the folk arts. (Aaron Watson)


This CD is a field recording of twenty-two tracks of Cajun and Creole music performed by various musicians in Southern Louisiana. The Lomax recordings were among the first published recordings made of folk musicians in different parts of the United States. In Cajun & Creole Music 1934/1937 we have the opportunity to hear music that was being performed at the same time jazz musicians were being influenced by other blues performers from other nearby locations. It is assumed that these jazz musicians would have had exposure to Cajun and Creole music as well. The recordings are often unaccompanied, thus giving them a simple “country” style of sound. They are in the vernacular language of the region.

In terms of connection to the New Negro Renaissance period, tracks 14 through 22 cover zydeco, jure, and the blues; thus they are associated with black musicians. These recordings primarily feature the musician Jimmy Peters. A striking picture of Peters is used on the cover of the recording. The cover photograph shows students what style of clothing these musicians wore, perhaps giving them an insight into the fashion of the youth from that period and location.

Musically speaking, the recordings are interesting rhythmically, harmonically, and
topically—in the topics of the lyrics. In track 14, “J’ai Fait Tout Le Tour Du Pays,” we hear a “hambone” style of rhythm that we later associate with the music of Bo Diddley. (Bo Diddley claims to have invented the rhythm, but this example should be included to dispute the claim.) In track 15, “S’en Aller Chez Moreau,” the lyrics are sung from the viewpoint of a woman who is worried that it is nearly sundown and her man is not home. This was of particular concern during that time period because of lynchings and curfew laws prohibiting blacks from being out after sundown. Although sung in Cajun French, this zydeco piece connects with its close cousin, the blues, which would have been sung in English; racism, not language, was the issue.

*Cajun & Creole Music 1934/1937* is a good example of the kind music that influenced the jazz and popular music styles of the New Negro Renaissance and later musical styles. It would be a valuable addition to the music classroom collection. (Tom Tacke)


The bravado of this collection’s title is matched (if not surpassed) by Stephen Calt’s liner notes: “Charlie Patton (1891-1934) was the most powerful blues recording artist of all time.” Upon listening to this album, however, the listener may recognize the writer’s point.

In the annals of the blues, no figure is more famous, revered, or mythologized than the great Robert Johnson. The simple fact remains, however, that Patton was a singular influence on the “king of the delta blues singers.” Without a doubt, this is a rough-and-tumble collection of blues classics. The only surviving image of Patton is featured on the cover, and the boyish man pictured belies the slapping guitar and growling vocals heard on the record. But the power of his voice and instrument cannot be denied, and the imprint of the New Negro Renaissance is indelible.

Certainly, Patton was among the earliest of the great Delta bluesmen whose music was committed to record, which makes this a valuable artifact from a purely historical standpoint. Scholars and critics were only just beginning to appreciate rural, folk arts such as the blues, and listeners today should be grateful for these ancient snapshots of sound. However, one could find no clearer bridge between blues as dance music and blues as serious personal expression than Patton. Many of the songs here feature Patton playing his guitar in a highly percussive fashion, and the up-tempo beats remind us that this music was originally considered entertainment, above all else.

Calt’s liner notes do an excellent job of comparing each of the twenty-six songs presented here, as he draws the listener’s ear to a few vocal and instrumental themes common to Patton’s music. In Calt’s words, Patton’s “facility for capturing his vocal nuances with impromptu guitar figures has never been matched by a blues guitarist.” While his final point is subjective, his descriptions of Patton’s songs as dance numbers are well-written and researched. He ably terms various pieces rags, breakdowns, and dance blues while notating the presence of Henry Sims’s fiddle on a couple of tunes. In other words, the liner notes are thorough and informative, and Calt effectively places Patton’s music in an accurate historical context.

Due to his ego, temper, and showmanship, Patton was not a popular figure among musicians during his lifetime. Players and singers who have followed him, however, were able to enjoy the man’s music minus his surly disposition. As blues music and recording technology were redefined (not independently) during the Renaissance, it becomes clearer why Patton’s place in history is safe. These recordings are a powerful summary of a superior bluesman.

(Aaron Watson)

Porgy and Bess was written by George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose and Dorothy Heyward. It was first staged as an opera in 1935 in Boston. The next month it made its debut in New York, then in Philadelphia in January of 1936.

The cover of this vintage LP shows a lively picnic scene with children and adults standing and sitting under the hanging moss of Charleston and Catfish Row. We can easily pick out the main characters of Bess, Porgy, Sportin’ Life, and Crown among the picnic goers. Using only gray, brown, and cream as primary colors makes the hot fuchsia pink accent color pop. This pink is used for patches on overalls and polka dots on fitted dresses, for head scarves, aprons, bowties and watermelon. The LP border is edged in a chocolate brown.

The cover is most intriguing and could relate to a variety of grade levels. Questions could relate to the color scheme (all characters have the same skin hue) and to the placement of the cast (Sportin’ Life is front and center and bigger, while Crown is in the background with fists on hips). Another question could focus on how clothing is used as a prop and watermelon as a stereotype. The fact that Gershwin required in his score an all-black cast and no one with black face also provides an opportunity for class discussion.

The recording notes are extracted from an article written by Merle Armitage. They suggest a recorded conversation with the composer, librettist, lyricist, friends and Armitage as mediator. Most detailed is the description of time spent on James Island near Charleston, South Carolina, “in the baking sun of July and August.” Both Gershwins describe one night walking into a run down shack where the cast of the “Gullah Negroes” was waiting. “George stops short, grabbing my arm.” Ira recalls. “We paused, then heard this extraordinary sound of a dozen voices raised in loud rhythmic prayer.” Ira continues that each voice started at a different time, with a different theme, but had formed a clear, rhythmic pattern all without words. The hurricane scene grew out of this excitement, with George using this memory for inspiration.

The music is as timely now as it was in the 1930s. Like the New Negro Renaissance, the opera’s story is a metaphor for a whole society. It is about race, class, and the disadvantaged—all taking place in the South. A migration to the North is the promise for Porgy to move on to a better life away from Catfish Row. (Beverly J. Whittington)


Timeless Historical Presents Jazz in California, 1923-1930 is a recording of six jazz bands that performed in the Los Angeles area during that time. The performances are split equally between all-black bands and those that were white. Included on this recording are 25 tracks as follows:

- Sonny Clay’s Plantation Orchestra (4 tracks)
- Vic Meyers and His Orchestra (2 tracks)
- Henry Halstead and His Orchestra (2 tracks)
Reb Spikes’ Majors and Minors (2 tracks)
Paul Howard’s Quality Serenaders (13 tracks)
Tom Gerunovich and His Roof Garden Orchestra (1 track)

The performances are well recorded and provide evidence that jazz was alive and well on the West Coast during the New Negro Renaissance time period. This is a collection of hot jazz foxtrots and swing band tunes. Although the pieces and bands are not generally considered mainstream or trend setting, they do provide interesting topics for discussion concerning the presence and state of jazz music on the West Coast of California during that time. Sonny Clay was a Texas-born musician who played drums for Jelly Roll Morton in Tijuana. Also interesting on this album is a contribution by Paul Howard’s Quality Serenaders. It represents the band’s entire recorded output and includes a young Lionel Hampton playing drums, singing on four of the tracks, and even playing piano on one track. *Timeless Historical Presents Jazz in California, 1923-1930* is a good source for any teacher interested in the music heard in California during the New Negro Renaissance. (Tom Tacke)


**Sheet Music / Scores:**


Subtitled *The Ballads, Blues and Folksongs of Huddie Ledbetter*, this volume of words and music offers a veritable primer on the life and songs of the great American folksinger. In just 96 pages, noted folklorists Asch and Lomax have managed to assemble a biographical sketch of the artist as well as accurately notated sheet music versions of 73 songs attributed to and/or associated with Leadbelly.

Any fan or scholar of folk music would find the introductory essays illuminating and fascinating, although these particular works have been written for a general audience rather than an academic one. Folk giants Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie both offer their personal recollections of the performer, and Charles E. Smith gives a biographical sketch of Leadbelly with an emphasis on his exposure to jazz/ragtime during the early years of the 20th century.

While this book would appeal to adults, many of the writers make a specific effort to describe Leadbelly’s rapport and devotion to children and children’s songs. In addition, many of the songs in the collection (“Happy Birthday,” “Skip to My Lou”) are certainly suitable for young singers. In other words, musicians and singers of all ages would find appealing material here. Adults will also be pleased with the quality of the transcriptions, as Leadbelly’s free-flowing melodies are notated in a manner quite true to his influential recordings.

The seeds of the folk revival were planted during the New Negro Renaissance, and many of these songs would have been composed, learned, and/or performed by Leadbelly during the years of 1919-1941. Efforts to mainstream this oral tradition flourished later, but these songs, though some are falsely attributed to Leadbelly, were part of African-American culture during this important period. Prior to the Renaissance, documentation of the black folk arts was

negligible at best. However, folklorists such as the aforementioned Lomax were instrumental in documenting these rich oral traditions, and a book such as *The Leadbelly Songbook* would not have been possible without the groundwork of previous decades.

Many of the tunes are introduced by Leadbelly himself, as his recollections of songs precede the notations and lyrics. The historical context he provides is invaluable, as Leadbelly explains why and/or how he composed many of these important songs. The rise of Leadbelly is a story that would have been extremely unlikely prior to the New Negro Renaissance, as an African-American folksinger imprisoned for manslaughter would have received little sympathy, let alone notoriety. This book is an incredible, succinct document of a man and his music. (Aaron Watson)

**Handy, W.C., ed. *Blues: An Anthology*. Albert & Charles Boni, 1926.**


*5 Boogie Woogie Piano Solos* by Pete Johnson is a collection of piano music published in 1941. Each piece included in this collection was transcribed from Pete Johnson’s original recordings. The collection contains the following pieces: “Blues on the Downbeat”; “Kaycee on My Mind”; “Cherry Red”; “Roll ‘Em Pete”; and “Holler Stomp.” The publication includes a brief history of Pete Johnson and states that he was the most prolific of the boogie-woogie pianists. His style is comparable to that of Mary Lou Williams. Pete Johnson was not educated at the Curtis Institute or Julliard but instead was educated at the “Backbiters’ Club” with local “greats” including Stacey La Guardia, “Slamfoot” Brown, Lewis “Good-Booty” Johnson, and Nello Edgar. There are also performance fingerings and suggestions for interpretation included in the publication.

The significance of the publication is multifaceted. Firstly, Pete Johnson reviewed and approved the transcriptions as being the best representation of his work. As mentioned, he was the most prolific of the boogie-woogie pianists. It is also important to note that Pete Johnson participated in the historic Carnegie Hall concert: “From Spirituals to Swing”.

This publication allows students to listen to and hopefully perform the authentic boogie-woogie music of the late 1930s. Music is a wonderful medium that allows students to work directly with a time period and not just read, listen, or watch videos about history. Students with some piano skills will enjoy learning to play the music. These pieces could also be transcribed to other mallet percussion instruments or to an electronic medium such as Garage Band. Having original music like *5 Boogie Woogie Piano Solos* by Pete Johnson provides a multitude of lessons on the music, the period, and specific popular culture preferences of the time. It also provides teachers with the ability to address the different learning modalities of their students. (Tom Tacke)


This songbook contains transcript material that was selected from the original recordings made by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress, ARC, Capital Records, Musicraft, RCA Records and Smithsonian Folkways Records. In this volume can be found a list of awards Lead Belly was given, quotes by the man himself about the blues, an instructional section, which contains guitar tuning information and chord diagrams to be used for playing, along with a brief description of tablature (which is a traditional guitar notation quite different
from standard “note” notation). After all of this material, there are the songs. The lyrics are typed out on a separate page with the song written in both standard notation and tablature on the next page. With each song, there is information about its transcription. The material is organized into four categories based on musical difficulty.

While many of the songs are for adults only with their colorful lyrics, there are a few songs in this volume that do lend themselves for use in the classroom. Some examples include “New York City,” “Rock Island Line,” “Christmas Is Coming,” “4, 5 and 9,” “The Children’s Blues,” and “Good Morning Blues.”

I have used a version of “Good Morning Blues” in my classroom for years, and it truly is one of the students’ favorites to sing. Besides singing this song, we can use this material to compare to other blues songs from the time, like “St. Louis Blues,” to find differences and similarities. There can also be genre comparisons as well with the music found between the two wars. I think it is important to introduce my elementary students to all types of musical genres, including the blues and jazz, and to give some context to understand how the music fits within society. The best way to make the music real for children is to have them absorb it through the familiarity that comes from singing it and making it their own. This anthology can certainly be used as a source to many great Lead Belly songs. (Shari Telaar)

**Marrone, Sandy ed. The St. Louis Blues and Other Song Hits of 1914. New York: Dover, 1990.**

This piano reduction anthology contains not only the musical hit songs from 1914, but also a fine reproduction of the cover page found on the sheet music as it would have been sold to consumers at the time. The beginning of the book contains an informative “Publisher’s Note” with an introduction to the songs found in the volume, a table of contents with publisher and composer information and a title and page number for each song entry. The editor then provides a brief bio for each songwriter and lyricist and a page of “Notes on the Song Texts” to aid the musician to better understand the references or slang terms used within the songs.

The book contains a number of songs from the great composer Irving Berlin, also “The Missouri Waltz” by James Royce Shannon and John Eppel, and Hermann Darewski and R.P. Weston’s composition “Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers,” which shows Al Jolson’s picture on the cover both in and out of blackface. Of greatest interest is W. C. Handy’s song “The St. Louis Blues.” The cover page for this piece actually labels it as “The Most Widely Known Ragtime Composition.” This is certainly fodder for discussion in the music classroom.

The anthology provides so much more than just lyrics and notes for musicians to reproduce. It has much for students to examine and discuss in class. While 1914 is in fact out of our 1919-1941 time frame, the book contains materials that lay the foundation necessary to appreciate the societal and musical changes found between the wars. Students can discuss the images on the coversheets and their role in appealing to the consumer and/or the importance of connecting a song to a famous performer or songwriter. How did “The St. Louis Blues” change over the many years it was recorded, and why did that particular song have such a prolonged life between 1914 and 1925 with Bessie Smith?

As an aside, I value Dover scores because they offer interested parties, be they musicians, educators or music fans, an affordable quality product. Combined with various recordings, this anthology could be quite beneficial in the classroom. (Shari Telaar)

**McShann, Jay. 5 Piano Solos. New York: Leeds Music Corp., 1942.**

This book is a true artifact of the New Negro Renaissance, a collection of traditional songs the like of which would not have existed prior to this period of rebirth and redefinition. In fact, even transcriptions of white folk music would have been exceedingly rare in the early part of the twentieth century, as Americans were not yet cognizant of the significance and sometimes fleeting nature of oral traditions. When institutional racism is added to the equation, the idea of preserving African-Americans’ folk art was positively revolutionary.

As the Renaissance flowered, the initial and most well-documented efforts were skewed toward the so-called high arts, those forms of expression that were previously perceived as the property of white Americans. However, as folklorists and song collectors began striving for authenticity, the African-American provenance of so many songs and folk arts could not be ignored.

This book begins with a series of chapters devoted to the origins of various African-American song forms, including spirituals, which make up the bulk of this volume. The twenty-first-century scholar would find interesting the impressions of these art forms in the time of the Renaissance, as Work’s understanding of oral tradition seems occasionally limited. However, though he refers to “inferior and incongruous material” found in spirituals, he also provides a serviceable account of the history of the blues. Work is certainly interested in preserving these oral art forms, and his documentation of the music’s history is laudable.

The bulk of the book is devoted to transcriptions of a variety of African-American folk songs. While the range of material is impressive, the songs are not alphabetized or grouped by genre, making for a sort of haphazard mix. That being said, the array of standards and unfamiliar songs makes for an impressive collection. The songs are unaccompanied and lack chord symbols, but Work does provide up to four additional vocal parts depending on the selection.

This is not a perfect collection, as the organization is somewhat lacking. However, the idea of documenting, cataloging, and preserving African-American folk songs was a relatively new pursuit in 1940, and Work’s efforts were both ahead of their time and influential. Work was a black music scholar, and his perception of traditional African-American music offers a unique window into the waning days of the New Negro Renaissance. Since many of these songs are still performed and studied to this day, American Negro Songs and Spirituals is a useful and captivating collection of traditional material. (Aaron Watson)

Web Sites:

Cultural Equity. Produced by the Association for Cultural Equity in collaboration with the Rock Foundation. (Sound, Photograph, and Video Collections, Discussions/Interviews). www.culturalequity.org