

ML  
3506  
.D68  
1995

# DOWN BEAT

UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTHERN COLORADO  
(MUSIC LIBRARY)  
GREELEY, COLO. 80639

# 60

# YEARS OF

# DOWN BEAT

EDITED BY FRANK ALKYER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN McDONOUGH

RESEARCH AND COPY EDITORS:  
JOHN McDONOUGH  
HOWARD MANDEL  
ED ENRIGHT  
JOHN EPHLAND

 **HAL•LEONARD™**  
CORPORATION  
7777 W. BLUEMOUND RD. P.O. BOX 13819 MILWAUKEE, WI 53213

Copyright © 1995 by HAL LEONARD CORPORATION  
International Copyright Secured

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by HAL LEONARD CORPORATION, 7777 W. Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213  
Printed in Winona, MN

ISBN 0-7935-3491-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

U OF NORTHERN COLORADO LIBRARIES



018500 6518263

# "I CREATED JAZZ IN 1902, NOT W.C. HANDY"

By Jelly Roll Morton  
AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 1938

Dear Mr. Ripley:  
For many years I have been a constant reader of your (Believe It or Not) cartoon. I have listened to your broadcast with keen interest. I frankly believe your work is a great contribution to natural science.

In your broadcast of March 26, 1938, you introduced W. C. Handy as the originator of jazz, stomps, and blues. By this announcement you have done me a great injustice, and you have also misled many of your fans.

It is evidently known, beyond contradiction, that New Orleans is the cradle of jazz, and I, myself, happened to be creator in the year 1902, many years before the Dixieland Band organized. Jazz music is a style, not compositions; any kind of music may be played in jazz, if one has the knowledge. The first stomp was written in 1906, namely "King Porter Stomp." "Georgia Swing" was the first to be named swing, in 1907.

You may be informed by leading recording companies. "New Orleans Blues" was written in 1905, the same year "Jelly Roll Blues" was mapped out, but not published at that time. New Orleans was the headquarters for the greatest ragtime musicians on earth. There was more work than musicians. Everyone had their individual style. My style seemed to be the attraction. I decided to travel, and tried Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, and many other states during 1903 and 1904, and was accepted as sensational.

In the year of 1908, I was brought to Memphis by a small theatre owner, Fred Barasso, as a feature attraction and to be with his number-one company for his circuit, which consisted of four houses, namely Memphis, Tenn., Greenville, Vicksburg, and Jackson, Miss. That was the birth of the negro theatrical circuit in the U.S.A. It was that year I met Handy in Memphis. I learned that he had just arrived from his home town, Henderson, Ken. He was introduced to me as Professor Handy.

Who ever heard of anyone wearing the name of Professor advocate ragtime, jazz, stomps, blues, etc.? Of course, Handy could not play either of these types, and I can assure you he has never learned them as yet (meaning freak tunes, plenty of finger work in the groove of harmonies, great improvisations, accurate, exciting tempos with a kick). I know Mr. Handy's ability, and it is the type of folk songs, hymns, anthems, etc. If you believe I am wrong, challenge his ability.

Professor Handy and his band played several days a week at a colored amusement park in Memphis, namely, Dixie Park. Guy Williams, a guitarist, worked in the band in 1911. He had a blues tune he wrote, called "Jogo Blues." This tune was published by Pace and Handy under the same title, and was later changed to "St. Louis Blues." Williams had no copyright as yet. In 1912, I happened to be in Texas, and one of my fellow musicians brought me a number to play—"Memphis Blues." The minute I started playing it, I recognized it. I said to James Milles, the one who presented it to me (trombonist, still in Houston, playing with me at that time), "The first strain is a Black Butts' strain all "dressed up." Butts was strictly blues (or what they call a Boogie Woogie player). I said the second strain was mine. I practically assembled the tune. The last strain was Tony Jackson's strain, Whoa B-

Whoa. At that time, no one knew the meaning of the word jazz or stomps but me. This also added a new word to the dictionary, to which they gave the wrong definition.

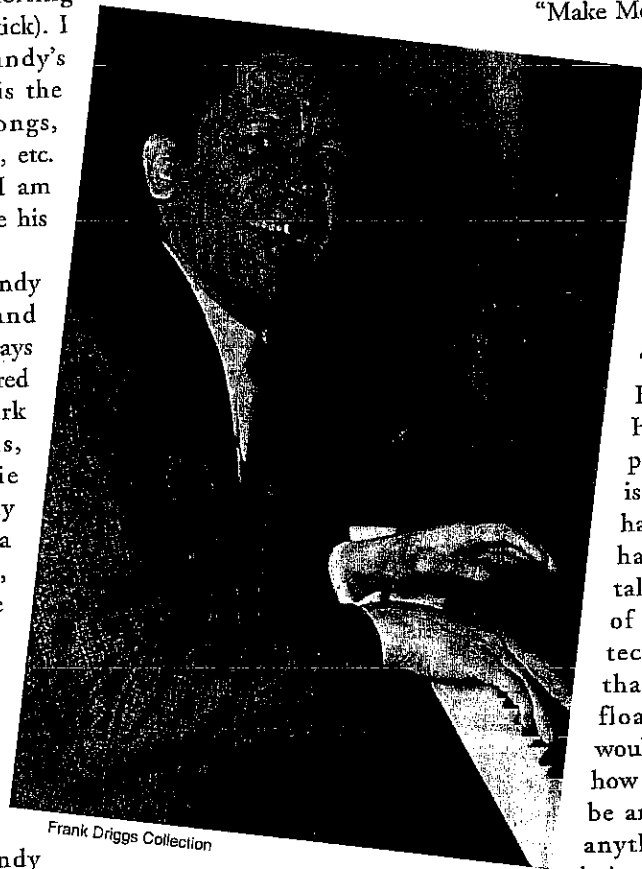
The word blues was known to everyone. For instance, when I was eight or nine years of age, I heard blues tunes entitled "Alice Fields," "Isn't It Hard To Love," "Make Me A Palate On

The Floor"—the latter which I played myself on my guitar. Handy also retitled his catalogue "Atlanta Blues." Mr. Handy cannot prove anything is music that he has created. He has possibly taken advantage of some unprotected material that sometimes floats around. I would like to know how a person could be an originator of anything, without being able to do at

least some of what they created.

I still claim that jazz hasn't gotten to its peak as yet. I may be the only perfect specimen today in jazz that's living. I guess I am 100 years ahead of my time. Jazz is a style, not a type of composition.

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not claim any of the creation of the blues, although I have written many of them even before Mr. Handy had any blues published. I had heard them when I was knee-high to a duck. For instance, when I first started going to school, at different times I would visit some of my relatives per permission,



Frank Driggs Collection

in the Garden district. I used to hear a few of the following blues players, who could play nothing else—Buddie Canter, Josky Adams, Game Kid, Frank Richards, Sam Henry, and many more too numerous to mention—they were what we call “ragmen” in New Orleans. They can take a 10¢ Xmas horn, take the wooden mouthpiece off, having only the metal for mouthpiece, and play more blues with that instrument than any trumpeter I had ever met through the country imitating the New Orleans trumpeters.

I hope that this letter will familiarize you more with real facts. You may display this in the most conspicuous places, it matters not to me. I played all Berlin’s tunes in jazz, which helped their possibilities greatly. I am enclosing you one of my many write-ups hoping this may help you in the authenticity of my statements. I am able to uphold all of my statements against any that may contradict. I barnstormed from coast to coast before Art Hickman made his first trip from San Francisco to New York. That was long before Handy’s name was in the picture.

I think one should have conclusive proof before being able to claim a title. I also advocate much more rigid laws so thieves may get their just deserts. There are many who enjoy glory plus financial gain’s abundance, even in the millions, who should be digging ditches or sweeping the streets.

My dear Mr. Ripley, I also ask you for conclusive proof, which I am sure that you will never be able to offer, due to the fact that the one who inveigled you into this announcement cannot give you any. He doesn’t know anything about the foundation. New York itself is just beginning to get wise to jazz and all the decent dispensers either came from parts that I have educated or from tutors of the good New York musicians. Not until 1926 did they get a faint idea of real jazz, when I decided to live in New York. In spite of the fact that there were a few great dispensers—such as Sidney Bechet, clarinet and William Brand, bass—New York’s idea of jazz was taken from the dictionary’s

definition—loud, blary, noise, discordant tones, etc., which really doesn’t spell jazz music. Music is supposed to be soothing, not unbearable—which was a specialty with most of them.

It is great to have ability from extreme to extreme, but it is terrible to have this kind of ability without the correct knowledge of how to use it. Very often you could hear the New York (supposed-to-be) jazz bands with 12-to-15 men. They would blaze away with all volume that they had. Sometimes customers would have to hold their ears to protect their eardrums from a forced collision with their brains.

Later in the same tune, without notification, you could hear only drums and trumpet. Piano and guitar would be going but not heard. The others would be holding their instruments leisurely, talking, smoking reefers, chatting scandals, etc. Musicians of all nationalities watched the way I played; then soon I could hear my material everywhere I trod; but in an incorrect way, using figures behind a conglomeration of variations sometimes discordant, instead of hot swing melodies.

My contributions were many: First clown director, with witty sayings and flashily dressed, now called master of ceremonies; first glee club in orchestra; the first washboard was recorded by me; bass fiddle, drums—which was supposed to be impossible to record. I produced the fly swatter (they now call them brushes).

Of course many imitators arose after my being fired or quitting. I do not hold you responsible for this. I only give you facts that you may use for ammunition to force your pal to his rightful position in fair life.

Lord protect us from more Hitlers and Mussolinis.

Very truly yours,

Jelly Roll Morton

*Originator of Jazz and Stomps*

*Victor Artist*

*World’s greatest Hot Tune writer ●*

## “I WOULD NOT PLAY JAZZ IF I COULD”

By W. C. Handy  
SEPTEMBER 1938



entlemen:

In looking over *Down Beat* I came across an article by Jelly Roll Morton captioned: “W.C. Handy is a Liar!” For your information, Ripley had me on his program “Believe It or Not,” and Mr. Jelly Roll Morton wrote a similar article in the *Baltimore Afro-American*—a negro journal. In order to refute such statements by Jelly Roll Morton in the future, we obtained letters and statistics, etc., to make available to any newspaper that would carry such a scurrilous article.

When a paper like yours circulates lies of Jelly Roll’s concoction to musicians and other professional people, it is doing me not only an injustice but an injury that is irreparable. If you want to be fair I am giving you material in this letter that you can assemble and use as a denial.

I feel perfectly sure of my position in the musical world and of my ability as a pioneer, creative musician, and composer. I brought a quartet from Alabama to Chicago for the World’s Fair in 1893, which sang native songs of my arrangement. I traveled with Maharas’ Minstrels, which had its headquarters at the Winterburn Show Printing Co. of Chicago in 1896, in which I arranged and played unusual unpublished Negro music. In 1897, I led the band that started from the same address, giving our first performance at Belvidere, Ill., on Aug. 4, 1896, and in Joliet, Ill., in 1897.

I was then arranging music for band, orchestra, and singers with my pen and later played Chicago at the Alhambra theatres, where some of Chicago’s ablest musicians followed my band to hear us play original compositions like “Armour Avenue.” This minstrel show traveled throughout the United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico. I had a great opportunity to hear what Negroes were playing in every city and hamlet. I lived and traveled all over the South and because